



Global Gender

BISEXUALITY IN EUROPE

**SEXUAL CITIZENSHIP, ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS,
AND BI+ IDENTITIES**

Edited by
Emiel Maliepaard and Renate Baumgartner



“A much needed anthology of bi+ research and theory, beyond the standard Anglo-American focus. This book brings together a wealth of exciting and important chapters from a diverse range of locations and perspectives, with a particularly rich exploration of bi+ relationships of all kinds. A must-read for sexuality and relationship scholars.”

– Meg-John Barker, author of *The Bisexuality Report*,
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Bisexuality in Europe

Bisexuality in Europe offers an accessible and diverse overview of research on bisexuality and bi+ people in Europe, providing a foundation for theorising and empirical work on plurisexual orientations and identities, and the experiences and realities of people who desire more than one sex or gender.

Counteracting the predominance of work on bisexuality based in Anglo-American contexts, this collection of 15 contributions from both early-career and senior academics reflects the current state of research in Europe on bisexuality and people who desire more than one sex or gender. The book is structured around three interlinked themes that resonate with the international research frontiers of bisexual theorising: bisexual citizenship, intimate relationships, and bisexual+ identities. This book is the first of its kind to bring together research from various European countries including Austria, Finland, Italy, the Netherlands, and Scandinavian countries, as well as from Europe as a wider geographical region. Topics include pansexual identity, non-monomonies, asylum seekers, and youth cultures.

This is an essential collection for students and researchers in LGBTQI Studies and Sexuality Studies.

Emiel Maliepaard is a researcher at Atria: Institute on Gender Equality. His work on the lived experiences of bisexual people has been published in, among other publications, *Social and Cultural Geography*, *Sexualities*, the *Journal of Bisexuality*, and *Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie*. Emiel has a special interest in social ontologies and theories such as practice theories. He organised (with Dr Caroline Walters) the First European Bisexuality Research Conference (2016), edited a special issue of the *Journal of Bisexuality* on (inter)national research frontiers in Europe, and wrote guidelines for bi inclusivity in Dutch (LGBT) organisations, healthcare services, and (government) policies. He is also involved in projects on sexual and (ex)partner violence.

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Global Gender

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Bisexuality in Europe

Sexual Citizenship, Romantic
Relationships, and Bi+ Identities

**Edited by Emiel Maliepaard
and Renate Baumgartner**



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1 Bisexuality in Europe

Introduction to the field and this book

Emiel Maliepaard and Renate Baumgartner

Introduction

This anthology reflects the current state of research in Europe on bisexuality and people who desire more than one sex or gender. It makes work accessible that is grounded in expertise beyond the Anglo-American world, which still dominates academia in general and the field of bisexuality research and theorising in particular (Monro, 2015; see also Swan & Habibi, 2018). This book is not meant to provide a complete overview of bisexuality in Europe, as this body of research is still relatively small and rather diverse. Instead, researchers from both continental Europe and the United Kingdom have teamed up to discuss their current research, contribute to ongoing discussions, and provide inspiration and guidance for students, early career researchers, and more senior academics to delve more deeply into current bisexual theorising and the lives of people who desire more than one sex or gender.

The anthology is a product of a network of developments, including the increase in the number of academics and postgraduate students who are interested in studying bisexuality and the social realities of bisexual people, as well as international events and gatherings of bisexual researchers. It seems that bisexuality research in (continental) Europe is on the rise (Maliepaard, 2018a), and this book documents these developments as well as providing a solid foundation for the further elaboration of European perspectives and discussions of bisexuality, and the experiences and realities of bisexual people. This book is the first of its kind to bring together research from various European countries, including Austria, Finland, Italy, the Netherlands, and Scandinavian countries, as well as from Europe as a wider geographical region.

This first chapter provides a tentative introduction to bisexuality research in Europe, then discusses the European research that falls into the three themes of this book: sexual citizenship, romantic relationships, and bi+ identities. It also reflects on terminology in bisexuality research, and concludes by discussing the structure of the book.

Bisexuality research in Europe

Research that includes theorising about bisexuality in Europe began as early as the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when sexologists and evolutionists introduced bisexuality in various contexts related to sexual differentiation and evolution on the one hand, and to a person's traits and dispositions on the other. In *A History of Bisexuality*, Angelides (2001) discusses these different uses and interpretations of bisexuality at length. For the purposes of this anthology, it suffices to highlight that bisexuality referred to three distinct but definitely interlinked phenomena (Hemmings, 2002). First, it referred to primordial hermaphroditism – embryological bisexuality – as the earliest form of human existence, before development and sexual differentiation. A second meaning of bisexuality was to describe people who possessed both masculine and feminine traits or dispositions – so-called psychological hermaphroditism. Third, bisexuality was conceptualised as a sexual desire, and ultimately as a sexual orientation and identity. This meaning was also an important aspect of the German-Austrian psychiatrist Richard von Krafft-Ebing's work on sexual inversion and the concept of psychosexual hermaphroditism. Psychosexual hermaphroditism was the first phase of sexual inversion (homosexuality), and it referred to bisexual desire within people who were described as *latently heterosexual*. Bisexuality as a desire was further developed in work by the Austrian Sigmund Freud, the founder of psychoanalysis, who understood bisexuality as the starting point of desire, before its differentiation into homosexual or heterosexual desire/attraction through positive or negative identification with the parent of the same or opposite sex. Only in the second half of the twentieth century did bisexuality become an authentic sexual identity: Austrian-born psychiatrist (and sexologist) Fritz Klein – who fled to the United States before World War II – further developed and complicated the Kinsey Scale (which had measured different degrees of sexual attraction to same-sex and opposite-sex people) into the Klein 'Sexual Orientation Grid' (KSOG). Klein contributed significantly to the understanding of bisexuality as an authentic sexual identity, not only with the KSOG – which added the time factor, and went beyond sexual attraction by also including features such as sexual behaviour, sexual fantasies, lifestyle, emotional preference, social preference, and self-identification – but also by publishing *The bisexual option* (Klein, 1993) and founding both the American Institute of Bisexuality and its flagship journal, the *Journal of Bisexuality*.

It is difficult to provide a complete picture of bisexuality research in Europe or European research that includes bisexual theorising. Academics publish in their own languages as well as in the lingua franca of academia. A large proportion of publications are indeed in English; however, a lot of work is also published in different languages, including Dutch (e.g. Goetstouwers, 2007), German (Kemler, Löw, & Ritter, 2012), Finnish (Kangasvuo, 2014), and Swedish (Bertilsson, 2001). Publication in academics' own languages

may hamper the development of European discussions; however, such publications do form a basis for further developing bisexuality research in their respective countries, and they provide opportunities for academics, policy-makers, activists, students, and bisexual people themselves to become familiar with national and perhaps even international discussions of bisexuality and bisexual people.

Today a substantial number of researchers who are working in non-Anglophone countries publish their work in English-language journals to actively engage with bisexual theorising. Following are some examples of researchers who are not part of this anthology but who have contributed to bisexuality research in Europe. Köllen (2013) studied bisexuality in LGBT diversity management in Germany; Gusmano (2018) wrote about polyamory and bisexuality in relation to coming out in Italy; Gustavson (2009) explored bisexuality in relationships in the context of Sweden; Oosterhuis and Lipperts (2013) discussed the slow acceptance of bisexuality in Dutch survey research and popular media; and Turai (2017, 2019) published on representations and positions of bisexuality in post-socialist Hungary. It is fair to conclude, however, that most work on bisexuality in Europe has been conducted by academics working in the United Kingdom. This work comprises not only a large number of articles, but also books that have dominated bisexual theorising in Europe (e.g. Hayfield, 2020; Hemmings, 2002; Klesse, 2007; Monro, 2015; Shepherd, 2019; Storr, 1999). Interestingly, an important cluster of bisexuality researchers is based at the Open University and has published widely on bisexuality in Britain (e.g. Bowes-Catton, 2007; Bowes-Catton, Barker, & Richards, 2011; Jones, 2011, 2016). Researchers at this institution also took the lead in the well-known *Bisexuality Report* published in 2012 (Barker et al., 2012), which they published together with a number of bisexual activists. Of course, this does not mean that all these authors have their personal origins in the United Kingdom; however, it makes clear that bisexuality research is more institutionalised in the United Kingdom than in other European countries (see also Maliepaard, 2018a). It is no surprise that most of the researchers based in continental Europe are conducting and publishing doctoral research, or are early career researchers who finished their doctoral degrees fairly recently.

Due to its relative short history, it is no surprise that bisexuality is not (yet) a sub-discipline within contemporary sociology or psychology. As in other geographical regions, such as the United States and Australia, bisexuality research and theorising have been taken up by researchers working in different disciplines. Nevertheless, most European studies of bisexuality are conducted by researchers in the fields of anthropology, psychology, and sociology. This seems to be quite similar to the situation in Australia and the United States, although a large share of the work in these contexts has been done by public health researchers (e.g. Ross et al., 2018 for a systematic review on mental health). There seem to be only a few studies in Europe that

focus on bisexual health, and there is a lot of potential in such studies (this will be discussed in Chapter 13). It may be true, however, that similar studies have been conducted in European countries but have only been published in the authors' native languages rather than in English-language peer-reviewed journals. Notable examples of studies that have partially embraced a public health approach include the aforementioned *Bisexuality Report* (Barker et al., 2012), the *Complicated?* report by Rankin, Morton, and Bell (2015), and a few individual articles – for example, on the relations between minority stress, social belongingness to LGBT communities, and the mental health of bisexual and lesbian women in Norway (Prell & Traeen, 2018). It is no surprise, then, that the majority of research on bisexuality in Europe is either based on qualitative research or is the result of more theoretical endeavours, while academic survey research on the realities of bisexual people seems to be rather absent. An interesting exception is Van Lisdonk and Keuzenkamp (2017), who used mixed-method research to understand the lived realities of same sex-attracted youth, and whose qualitative sample included several people who identified as bisexual. This emphasis on qualitative research and theoretical endeavours is also reflected in the contents of this book.

Bisexuality in Europe: Themes

In his article, 'Historicising Contemporary Bisexuality', MacDowall (2009) concludes that from the mid-1990s onwards, British and American studies on bisexuality focused predominantly on making space for bisexuality within academia – so-called reparative studies. An important motivation for this focus was the feeling that bisexuality and bisexual people had been invisible or ignored in contemporary academic scholarship. For instance, British geographer Bell (1995) argued against the placelessness and homelessness of bisexuality and bisexual people in society: bisexuality had no place even on the margins of his discipline, the geography of sexualities (see also Maliepaard, 2015a). His conclusion was supported by Monro, Hines, and Osborne (2017), who analysed sexualities scholarship between 1970 and 2015, and concluded that bisexuality was indeed invisible and perhaps marginalised in sexualities scholarship. Their article proposes a number of reasons why bisexuality was invisible, including the heterosexist or heteronormative nature of the scholarship, the emphasis on gay and lesbian experiences (as a result of gay and lesbian identity politics), and the rise of queer approaches within sexualities scholarship. Finally, Barker (2007), who analysed 22 undergraduate psychology textbooks (introductory, biological, developmental, and social psychology) found that bisexuality was rarely mentioned and never theorised in depth. Besides addressing the invisibility of bisexual desires, experiences, and identities, reparative studies focus on the legitimisation of bisexuality as a solid research theme by emphasising that bisexual people have different realities, and therefore deserve academic study and theorising.

Most research on bisexuality – both reparative studies and those that engage with bisexual theorising and possibly wider social theories – is focused on the lived experiences of people who identify as bisexual, and more recently also on those who identify as pansexual, queer, and/or omni-sexual. Far fewer studies discuss the realities of people who desire people of more than one sex or gender: studying bisexual orientations or desires seems to be a less usual, and possibly less safe, option for bisexuality scholars.

In this section, we discuss the three themes of this anthology: sexual citizenship, romantic relationships, and bi+ (or plurisexual) identities.

Sexual citizenship

One of the more minor themes in European research is bisexual citizenship. Sexual citizenship refers to relations between sexualised individuals and the state or society at large. Work has been published that focuses on the relationship between bisexuality and the state (e.g. Maliepaard, 2015b; Marcus, 2018; Monro, 2005) and bisexual communities (e.g. Applebee, 2015; Bowes-Catton et al., 2011; Monro, 2015; Voss, Browne, & Gupta, 2014). At the level of national and local governments, the limited research has shown that policy and legislation have been ignorant of the lived experiences and needs of bisexual people, which hampers bisexual people's attempts to achieve cultural citizenship or exercise their rights to freely engage in romantic relationships, sexual activity, partner choice, identity development, and identity expression (e.g. Maliepaard, 2015b). As argued by Monro (2005), three issues need to be addressed to make space for bisexual citizenship: accepting bisexual identities; embracing sexual fluidity instead of limiting ourselves to static identities and orientations; and making space for relational diversity, looking beyond monogamy in both policy and legislation. Furthermore, we would add, it is of vital importance to address the sexual, mental, and physical health needs and challenges of bisexual people in order to draft useful and specific policies to enable bisexual people to participate fully – or at least to increase their participation – in everyday life (see also Marcus, 2018). While Marcus (2018) hints at the situation of bisexual asylum seekers, there is no scholarship yet on the lived experiences of bisexual asylum seekers, and only very limited work on LGBT asylum seekers that also focuses on the paths of bisexual asylum seekers.

Bisexual citizenship and bi-inclusivity in legislation and policy are not a minor challenge for policy-makers or politicians, since bisexual people's realities may be even less valued than gay and lesbian realities (see Monro & Richardson, 2010). Bisexual communities, organisations, and events have the potential to speak with one voice and make political demands, urging politicians and policy-makers to actually pay attention to bisexual citizenship in policy and legislation (Maliepaard, 2015b; Voss, Browne, & Gupta, 2014).

Nevertheless, while research on communities suggests that bisexual communities, organisations, and events are helpful support networks for bisexual people, providing opportunities to meet like-minded people and encounter no (or less) negativity because of their sexual attraction (Voss, Browne, & Gupta, 2014), there is still a lot of work to do, as bisexual movements are not thriving in many European countries (e.g. Lahti, 2015; Turai, 2018). Furthermore, bisexual communities themselves may not be inclusive of all bisexual people – for instance, bisexual people with more right-wing political orientations, lower incomes, disabilities, or diverse ethnic backgrounds may feel excluded (e.g. Applebee, 2015; Monro, 2015).

Finally, work on bisexual citizenship may be extended to look not only at relations between bisexuality and the state or society at large, but also at sociocultural institutions such as religious systems. Indeed, there has been a rise in publications that discuss the diverse and complex interactions between religious institutions and the lived experiences of bisexual individuals (e.g. Shepherd, 2019; Toft & Yip, 2018; Yip & Toft, 2020). The current body of research seems to focus on the interactions between Christianity and bisexual people; however, Yip and Toft's (2020) edited volume discusses – both theoretically and empirically – the lived experiences of bisexual people who have different religious and spiritual backgrounds and live in various contexts such as the United Kingdom, Turkey, Lebanon, Canada, and the United States.

Romantic relationships

Klesse (2011) notes that research on bisexuality and romantic relationships emerged during the AIDS epidemic. It is no surprise that research on relationships became a substantial theme in European bisexuality research, since romantic relationships are often seen as one of the core elements of social life (Gustavson, 2009). However, the number of studies is still quite low (Hayfield, Campbell, & Reed, 2018). There are three interlinked foci within this theme: the intersection between bisexuality and polyamory (e.g. Gusmano, 2018; Klesse, 2018); the (in)visibility of bisexual people in romantic relationships, including people's agency to create bisexual display (e.g. Daly, King, & Yeadon-Lee, 2018; Hayfield et al., 2013; Lahti, 2015); and the negotiation of bisexuality in romantic relationships, including the impact of binegativity and bisexual stereotypes (e.g. Baumgartner, 2017; Gustavson, 2009; Hayfield et al., 2018). While research in the United States has also focused on the (mental) health implications of relationships for bisexual people, and has observed that romantic relationships may lead to health risks (see Feinstein & Dyar, 2018), this has not yet been studied thoroughly from European perspectives.

Within popular discourse, it is often understood that bisexuality and non-monogamy are strongly related. Nevertheless, one might also describe this relationship as “peculiar” or even contradictory (Klesse, 2005, 2011).

Bisexual stereotypes about promiscuity (Klesse, 2011) and the need to have relationships with both men and women – either at the same time or sequentially – in order to be truly bisexual (e.g. Hemmings, 2002) feed the understanding that a large percentage of bisexual people are indeed non-monogamous or polyamorous. While statistics seem to be absent, it is worthwhile to look at bisexual citizenship through this particular lens as well (see Monro, 2005). Klesse (2011, 2018) focuses, among other things, on the difficult relationship between non-monogamy, the law, and the (in-between) position of bisexuality, and discusses how legislation is not equipped for polyamorous bisexuals and hampers their freedom to shape their own romantic lives. Klesse (2018) also shows how “slippery slope” arguments are used in the United States to suggest that gay marriage leads to bisexual marriage and thus to group marriage, and he proposes that alternative discourses are needed to improve bisexual citizenship.

At the level of lived experience, Gusmano’s (2018) essay on people who are both bisexual and polyamorous argues that in Italy it is often wise not to disclose one’s bisexuality or polyamory. However, the essay also suggests that polyamorous communities may be safe spaces for bisexual people, due to their open-minded nature and the absence of bisexual communities. Discussing coming out in the workplace, Popova (2018) argues that while bisexual identities are invisible, they only become actionable in the intersection with polyamory. On a different level, the assumed connection between bisexuality and non-monogamy may indeed empower bisexual people to actually explore alternative relationship styles such as non-monogamy and polyamory (Gustavson, 2009). Nevertheless, there is much need for further research on the lived experiences of bisexual people who negotiate monogamy, non-monogamy, and/or polyamory in their romantic relationships, and on the impact of these negotiations on relationship satisfaction and (mental) health.

Today, more attention is being paid to the impact of binegativity on relationships. Baumgartner (2017), for instance, discusses how binegativity from partners may be internalised, and may impact the way bisexual people see relationships and their own positions within them. In particular, stereotypes regarding promiscuity, cheating, and non-monogamy are mentioned as factors that impact on how bisexual people shape their relationships. Indeed, Hayfield, Campbell, and Reid (2018) argue that bisexual people may experience difficulties in finding and maintaining romantic relationships due to these stereotypes and negativity, and they sometimes seem to proactively distance themselves from such highly sexualised stereotypes in order to be seen as trustworthy partners. Gustavson (2009) briefly discusses the role of jealousy and binegativity in bisexual women’s relationships, connecting these reactions (among other things) to the tensions between lesbian and bisexual individuals. The role of emotions such as jealousy may need more exploration and discussion. Interestingly, Baumgartner (2017), Gustavson (2009), and Hayfield, Campbell, and Reid (2018) have all discussed the role

of partners and how (ex-)partners understood/understand one's bisexuality; however, actual research with (ex-)partners, such as the work by Pallotta-Chiarolli (2016), seems to be lacking in Europe. Finally, and relatedly, we support Lahti's (in Hayfield & Lahti, 2017) effort to shift from understanding relationships as the product of conscious interactions and meaning-making to understanding relationships as a constant negotiation process that results in more-than-conscious experiences – experiences that are difficult to grasp in words. Conceptualising romantic relationships in this way may shed light on how bisexual people and their partner(s) experience relationships not only through conscious reflection or by focusing on remarkable events, but also through affects, emotions, and feelings.

Bi+ identities

Not surprisingly, in light of the history of bisexuality and the contemporary focus on people who identify as bisexual (and on other sexual identities used by people who desire more than one sex or gender), a vast body of studies has focused on bisexual identities as a research theme. It would be impossible to summarise all the studies that have been conducted on this theme, even in Europe. Examples include studies on identity management, coming out, disclosure (e.g. Gusmano, 2018; Maliepaard, 2018b; Popova, 2018), bisexual identities within contemporary sexuality discourse (e.g. Bowes-Catton, 2007), and methods to render one's bisexual identity visible in a society that equates sexual identity with the sex or gender of one's partner (Deschamps, 2008; Engelberg, 2018; Hayfield et al., 2013; Maliepaard, 2018b).

On a more political level, Bowes-Catton (2007) analyses political texts by bisexual theorists/activists such as Sue George, Clare Hemmings, and Jo Eadie, and identifies two discursive strategies used to position bisexuality and bisexual identities. The first strategy is to position bisexuality as invisible in the heterosexual/homosexual binary, thereby emphasising that bisexuality (as identity and as people) is done an injustice, and that people need to resist this injustice and proactively make space for bisexual identities. The second strategy, inspired by poststructuralist theory, approaches the binary system as restrictive, and positions bisexuality as an epistemology to undo all kinds of binary, well beyond the sex, gender, or sexuality binary. Barker, Richards, and Bowes-Catton (2009) also focus on the complex, overlapping, and sometimes diverging understandings of the relationship between queer (theory) and bisexual identities. Their article reflects an important discussion regarding the potential of queer theory, identifications, and language for bisexual activism and identities, without shying away from a discussion of the limits of queer, such as its abstract nature and its potential negative impacts on bisexual identity politics. The article urges its readers to embrace both identity politics and the deconstructive potential of queer and queer theory.

Interestingly, Deschamps (2008) makes it clear that, due to the lack of consensus over what bisexuality is, there is also no consensus regarding how to make bisexuality visible by using symbols and other material clues. Furthermore, it is also rather difficult to make bisexual desire visible in images or films without falling into the trap of stereotyping bisexuality (e.g. Engelberg, 2018); even when bisexuality is depicted through a threesome (sexually and romantically), it may still be the case that people will interpret it through a monosexual lens (Deschamps, 2008; Hemmings, 2002). Hayfield and colleagues (2013) reveal that while women may play with their appearance to render their bisexuality visible, this remains difficult. It seems that people mainly are able to express their bisexual identity through verbal clues (Hayfield et al., 2013; Maliepaard, 2018b). Nevertheless, research within this realm focuses mainly on how bisexual people themselves disclose or express their bisexuality, and not on how other people interpret the verbal, non-verbal, and material clues of bisexual people. Studies do hint at how bisexual people perceive themselves as viewed by others – for instance, discussing how bisexuality is rendered invisible and people are often interpreted as either heterosexual or gay/lesbian. However, there is no clear focus yet on how others actually understand these verbal, non-verbal, and/or material clues, or whether they have particular ideal types of bisexuality and bisexual people.

Several studies also focus on dynamics within identities, using longitudinal data. Kangasvuo (2011), among others, discusses how the lived experiences of bisexual people changed thanks to changes in Finnish legislation and culture. She also discussed how the understanding and importance of bisexual identities can change over time because of such changes, as well as changes in one's personal life. Another insightful study focuses particularly on how people's sexual identities change over time: Jones (2016) argues that a life-course perspective on sexual identities and sexual/emotional attraction may be helpful to complicate our understandings of people's sexual, romantic, and socio-sexual lives, as well as rendering bisexuality visible. Unfortunately, there is little research that uses a life-course approach or focuses on the later lives of bisexual people (or people who have identified as bisexual, or who are or were sexually attracted to people of more than one sex or gender during their life-course); this clearly is a knowledge gap. Finally, Jones' (2016) claim that the realities of older bisexual people – due to their bisexual histories in earlier life – are different from those of gay and lesbian older people is a good starting point for the study of older people as people with sexual presents and pasts.

Terminology

As bisexuality research blossoms, it is unavoidable that researchers will use different concepts to describe the lived experiences of people who desire more than one sex or gender, or to describe the social world in general. While

compiling this anthology, we found it important to encourage contributors to use some important concepts over others, in order to bring more clarity to the discussion, and to make it easier for researchers to discuss these concepts and the realities of bisexual people.

Bisexuality is often seen as the invisible sexuality within the binary system of sex, gender, and sexualities, as bisexual theorists such as Yoshino (2000) and Hemmings (2002) have already discussed at length. It seems impossible to think beyond binaries when we discuss social categories such as sex, gender, and sexual orientation. Ault (1996) discusses the emergence of a new binary – monosexuals versus non-monosexuals – in which the former refers to gay, lesbian, and heterosexual people and the latter to bisexual people (and others who are sexually and/or emotionally attracted to people of more than one sex or gender, and who possibly identify as pansexual, queer, and/or omniseual, etc.). Ault (1996) rightfully argues that new binaries lead to further polarisation; however, the monosexual versus non-monosexual binary seems to be a form of bisexual agency that shifts bisexuality from the margin (or, at any rate, beyond the margin) to the centre of discussions on sexual orientations and sexual identities. Bisexual people, as well as others who do not identify as monosexual, no longer necessarily need to position themselves in terms of the heterosexual-homosexual divide, but are able to use the monosexual versus non-monosexual discourse to develop alternative understandings of their (bi)sexuality. This provides them with basic tools to rearrange understandings of their sexual orientation and identity/identities, and of the unique position their orientation and identity/identities occupy in our contemporary social world and the ordering of our sexual lives: away from bisexuality as invisible because of the heterosexual-homosexual divide, and away from understanding bisexuality as a middle ground that reproduces binary understandings of sex, gender, and sexuality.

Despite this success of the monosexual versus non-monosexual binary, it seems that we are witnessing a change to this dichotomy thanks to its linguistic reformulation. Researchers from the United States have argued for a reformulation of this divide as a monosexual versus plurisexual binary, in which plurisexuality occupies almost the same position as non-monosexuality. This is explained in a footnote to one of the earliest articles to discuss plurisexual people: “We use the term plurisexual instead of non-monosexual throughout the manuscript because it does not linguistically assume monosexual as the ideal conceptualisation of sexuality” (Galupo et al., 2014, p. 452). The concept of plurisexuality indeed does not assume monosexuality as the norm, and therefore it gives positive connotations to people who desire more than one sex and/or gender (irrespective of their sexual identity/identities). It is important to keep in mind that language *does*: language has a performative force and provides opportunities to shape and reshape our understandings of the social and sexual lives of human beings. We therefore encouraged the authors to embrace this linguistic shift, and to refer to plurisexual orientations and identities instead

of non-monosexual orientations and identities when talking about people who desire more than one sex or gender, or who identify as bisexual, pansexual, omnisexual, and/or queer. Of course, contributors do use specific labels when they are talking about people who use those specific labels.

The introduction of plurisexuality instead of non-monosexuality, however, does not mean that monosexuality is not the norm in contemporary Western societies. Bisexual theorists often use the term “mononormativity” to describe the institutionalisation and strong discourse (or even a social ideology) of monosexuality. This discourse is based on the assumption that one is either homosexual or heterosexual, that one’s sexual identity is directly linked to the sex or gender of one’s partner, and that one’s sexual orientation (and thus one’s identity) is immutable. Mononormativity is often understood as a reason why bisexuality and bisexual people are rarely visible in society, as people predominantly read others as heterosexual or homosexual, and therefore bisexuals seem to pass as heterosexual or gay/lesbian (Lingel, 2009; Maliepaard, 2017).

In bisexual theorising and research, academics often use mononormativity and monosexism interchangeably to address the institutionalisation of monosexuality. Nevertheless, as already observed by Hayfield, Campbell, and Reid (2018), mononormativity is also used to identify a set of norms related to monogamy, including by academics working on bisexuality (e.g. Gusmano, 2018; Monro, 2015). In this context, mononormativity encompasses the idea that a successful romantic relationship is an enduring, exclusive relationship between two individuals. While originally referring to different-sex couples, it now includes same-sex couples (Gustavson, 2009). It should be said, however, that researchers also use different concepts to highlight the institutionalisation of the monogamous couple. Klesse (2011) writes about compulsory monogamy, whereas Toft and Yip (2018) use the terms “compulsory coupledness” and “compulsory monogamy” to describe how monogamy is naturalised and idealised in society. In their words, compulsory coupledness/monogamy is “the dominant aspiration norm that underpins the popular construction of ‘committed’ and ‘faithful’ intimate (couple) relationships” (Toft & Yip, 2018, p. 245). This anthology does not want to contribute to further confusion regarding how mononormativity is used, so we encouraged contributors to use the term “mononormativity” when discussing the institutionalisation of monosexuality, and “compulsory coupledness/monogamy” if they were writing about social norms related to monogamy.

Introducing the chapters

Following this introduction, the anthology continues in Part I by examining sexual citizen, beginning with Zeynab Peyghambarzadeh’s discussion in Chapter 2 of the position of bisexuality within asylum procedures and its implied invisibility as sexual identity, including a number of telling examples

from European countries as well as Canada. Peyghambarzadeh not only describes asylum procedures but also zooms in on the difficulties faced by asylum seekers in creating a coherent bisexual story to tell during asylum interviews, outlining a variety of problems related to bisexual stereotypes and societal understandings of sex, gender, and sexuality.

Chapter 3, by Emiel Maliepaard, focuses on the relationship not between the sexualised subject and the state, but between the sexualised subject and society. On the basis of interviews with key bisexual activists from the Netherlands, he discusses historical developments, how communities are organised (and at risk of collapse), and how a specific habitus is *imposed*, accepted, and resisted by bisexual people. The chapter concludes with recommendations for bisexual activists to improve national and/or local organisations for bisexual/plurisexual people.

In Chapter 4, Carol Shepherd takes up a European perspective and gives a mostly theoretical discussion of why bisexual subjects are often ignored in Christian faith communities throughout Europe. Issues such as horizontal oppression, ignorance of bisexuality, and the presence of general erotophobia contribute to ambivalent stances towards bisexual experiences and bisexual subjects in these faith communities. These factors, as well as the sanctity of coupledness, may have detrimental effects on the mental health of young members of these communities.

The last chapter in this part, Chapter 5 by Christian Klesse, is a theoretical exercise in bifeminist thought related to non-monogamy since the 1970s. He discusses key texts by feminist voices grounded in bisexual activism to show how the quest for autonomy – most importantly, erotic autonomy – is one of the central arguments of bifeminist thinkers when arguing for bisexual nonmonogamy. Bifeminist thinkers are inspired by, yet distance themselves from, lesbian feminists. The specific argumentation used by bifeminist thinkers depends on, among other factors, the historical context, political stances, and the theoretical framework that is applied by key figures.

Part II on romantic relationships begins with Annukka Lahti's Chapter 6 on bisexuality in relationships, which applies a Deleuzo-Guattarian framework. This chapter discusses bisexual identities and relationships as emerging in assemblages between human and non-human bodies, instead of as fixed realities. Furthermore, Lahti opens up a new research field by focusing on the interactions between bisexual individuals, their partner(s), and their social relationships to make sense of the lived experiences of bisexual people in Finland.

In Chapter 7, Sarah Jane Daly discusses literature on bisexual women and monogamy. She first provides a thorough discussion of how understandings of human sexuality shape the romantic and sexual lives of women before focusing on contemporary thought on monogamy. The chapter concludes by discussing the intersection between bisexual women and monogamy on the basis of existing theoretical and empirical literature, before drawing attention to the invisibility of bisexuality in monogamous relationships.

In Chapter 8, which was originally published in the *Psychology of Sexualities Review*, Renate Baumgartner discusses the romantic relationship experiences of non-monogamous bisexual women in Austria. This chapter engages with bisexual people's understandings of relationships and the position of bisexuality within romantic relationships. Baumgartner's focus on binegativity from (ex-)partners and internalised binegativity sheds lights on the impacts of bisexual stereotypes on relationship choices, negotiations, and experiences. However, the chapter also includes a discussion of the agency of bisexual people to choose their non-monogamous relationships.

In Chapter 9, Nicole Braida discusses the intersection between bisexuality and non-monogamy in the lives of plurisexually identified people in Italy. On the basis of interviews with 32 plurisexual non-monogamous people, Braida discusses at length the experiences of these people within both LGBT and polyamory communities, and provides a nuanced understanding of the intersection between bisexuality and non-monogamy. Finally, the chapter focuses on how Braida's research participants negotiated binormativity and polynormativity in their everyday romantic and sexual lives.

Beginning Part III on bi+ identities, Robin Rose Breetveld focuses in Chapter 10 on bisexual identities and experiences by using an epistemological approach. This chapter discusses in depth the difficult position and possible erasure of bisexuality and bisexual identities in existing sexuality discourses by introducing the concept of epistemic injustice into bisexual theorising. Breetveld builds on the concepts of testimonial injustice, hermeneutical injustice, and wilful hermeneutic ignorance to show how bisexual experiences are rendered invalid, and to reveal bisexual subjects' difficulties in adding knowledge to societal and academic understandings of bisexual people.

Using an anthropological approach, in Chapter 11 Jenny Kangasvuo traces historical understandings of bisexuality and bisexual identity in Finland and neighbouring countries by focusing on policies, popular publications, and the experiences of bisexual individuals. This chapter does not just discuss how bisexuality became a well-known and authentic sexual identity for people who are attracted to people of more than one sex or gender; Kangasvuo also explores the different meanings attached to bisexuality, particularly how bisexuality was once understood as an issue for (gay) men but currently is more frequently linked to (heterosexual) women.

In Chapter 12, Nikki Hayfield examines the existing international (social) psychological research on the recognisability of bisexual and pansexual individuals. Building on previous work, Hayfield discusses how gay men are perceived as effeminate men and lesbian women as masculine women within our collective understandings. On the basis of existing experimental research, however, it is doubtful whether bisexual and pansexual individuals will be recognised on the basis of their appearance and their visual identities – as Hayfield asks, what about the existence of bidar and pandar?

The final chapter, Chapter 13, provides an overview of bisexuality research in Europe. What are our ideas about bisexuality research and theorising for the coming years? We identify a number of challenges and opportunities to advance bisexual theorising, and to contribute to mainstream social theories and discussions regarding minority people.

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Part I

Sexual citizenship



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2 The untellable bisexual asylum stories

Zeynab Peyghambarzadeh

Introduction

Bisexual asylum seekers constitute a very low percentage of LGBT asylum seekers (Rehaag, 2009). While there is not enough data about the percentage of bisexual individuals among the LGBT population of the countries from which most of these asylum seekers come,¹ some studies claim that the number of individuals who are attracted to people of more than one sex or gender is much higher than the number of gay and lesbian individuals in countries like the United Kingdom and United States (YouGov, 2015a, 2015b). Although many human rights treaties and conventions such as those of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, 2011, 2012), the Council of the European Union (2004), and USA Citizenship and Immigration Services (2011) claim to support all LGBT asylum seekers, in practice, bisexual asylum seekers' claims may be rejected more than those of lesbian, gay, and trans asylum seekers (Jansen & Spijkerboer, 2011; LaViolette, 2015; Rehaag, 2009). I review previous studies as well as theoretical discussions on asylum and sexual orientation to explain the untellability of plurisexual stories in the context of seeking asylum based on sexual orientation and discuss how asylum seekers have to perform "refugeeness" and "gay-ness" to fit within a dominant mononormative narrative.

Intimate citizenship of bisexual asylum seekers

Plummer (2001) suggests the concept of intimate citizenship to discuss the intimate troubles of modern life, including public debates around acceptable forms of sexuality. Plummer (1995, p. 17) defines intimate citizenship as:

A cluster of emerging concerns over the rights to choose what we want to do with our bodies, our feelings, our identities, our relationships, our genders, our eroticisms and our representations.

By referring to the concepts of intimate citizenship, Monro (2015) discusses how not only the dominant heteronormative understanding of citizenship but

even the newer reformist assimilationist homonormative approach to sexual citizenship fail to consider the “fluidity, complexity, and multiplicity” that exist among bisexual citizens (Monro, 2015, p. 142). This homonormative approach advocates for the private sexual rights of same-sex couples in stable monogamous relationships and does not question the heteronormative definition of a “good” citizen. As Monro explains, since bisexual individuals have particular intimate citizenship issues, bisexuality challenges the dominant understanding of sexual citizenship in different ways. First, a considerable number of bisexual individuals are openly non-monogamous, which does not match the dominant monogamous understanding of relationship. Second, the fluidity of their sexuality challenges the dominant static and fixed mononormative understanding of sexual orientations. This mononormative approach prioritises monosexual sexual orientations, including heterosexuality and homosexuality, over plurisexual sexual orientations such as bisexuality, pansexuality, polysexuality, heteroflexibility, homoflexibility, and queer. Third, some bisexual individuals have a queer approach to sexuality, which renders categories of sex, gender, and sexuality fluid or even challenges the relevance of these categories. As Marcus (2018) shows, since bisexual individuals have not been considered in the relevant legal documents, they face more difficulties in claiming their intimate rights compared with monosexual applicants. As a result, bisexual asylum seekers are at a higher risk of losing their chance of being granted asylum based on sexual orientation.

Who is an asylum seeker?

The history of asylum as a modern concept goes back to the displacement of a large group of Europeans as a result of World War II. After the establishment of the United Nations in 1945, the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognised the responsibility of nation states to protect citizens of other nation states, when home countries’ governments are not capable or willing to do so. In 1950, the UNHCR was established and the 1951 Refugee Convention. Article 1A(2) defines a refugee as a person who is

owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion ... and is unable or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself to the protection of that country.

(UNHCR, 2010, p. 14)

Since then, there has been constant discussion among the caseworkers in the UNHCR and migration offices of different countries and the applicants, their lawyers, and activists about defining the key concepts of this Article, such as “a well-founded fear”, “a particular social group”, and a “member” of such a group (Jansen & Spijkerboer, 2011; Zilli & Hooper, 2016).

Sexual orientation-based asylum

Until the 1980s, sexual orientation was not considered a valid reason to seek asylum, and asylum cases based on sexual orientation could be rejected because attraction towards the same sex was still considered as a “sexual deviation” and a “mental illness” in many countries, including several Western European and North American countries (Bennett, 1999). During the 1980s, some European countries started to recognise gay and lesbian communities as “particular social groups” in need of protection. In 2004, the EU qualification directive in Article 10 clarified that “a particular social group might include a group based on common characteristics of sexual orientation”. In 2011, gender identity was added to this Article (Jansen, 2013). In the early 1990s, the United States recognised gays as a particular group with an immutable characteristic and consequently eligible for granting asylum (Shuman & Bohmer, 2014). Article 16 of the UNHCR guidelines mentions:

A claimant’s sexuality or sexual practices may be relevant to a refugee claim where he or she has been subject to persecutory (including discriminatory) action on account of his or her sexuality or sexual practices.
(UNHCR, 2002, p. 4)

Since the ‘Guidance Note on Refugee Claims Relating to Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity’ (UNHCR, 2012) was published by UNHCR, finding the appropriate methods to assess the credibility of sexual orientation based asylum cases has been a challenge for both UNHCR and migration officers and judges (Hooper, 2016). Since sexual orientation is a private issue, it is hard to prove one’s sexuality, and in many cases there is no evidence other than the testimony of the applicant. Consequently, the UNHCR guideline suggests focusing on the identity and life stories of applicants. Telling personal stories during the asylum interview can retraumatize asylum seekers and they have to be able to remember the details and explain them in a specific way to strangers under the pressure of an interview process.

Telling sexual stories in the asylum process

Different stages of the asylum-seeking process can be viewed as different storytelling occasions (Shuman, 2012). According to Plummer (2001, p. 42), on any storytelling occasion, two main groups are involved. The first group includes story producers who may need to ally with “coaxers, coaches and coercers”. Listeners, questioners, coaxers, coaches, and coercers can have an important impact on shifting the stories. The second group includes readers who “consume, interpret and make sense of the stories” (Plummer, 2001, p. 42) and their reactions toward these stories can be under the influence of time, place, and local context as well as the wider context or

“metanarratives”. Plummer (2001, p. 44) argues that although stories are changing all the time in the interaction between these two groups, “they can become habitualised and stable”. In the asylum interview, as the main storytelling occasion in the asylum process, asylum seekers are storytellers who are trying to tell their stories to the case officers and judges with the help of different groups of “coaxers, coaches and coercers”, including other asylum seekers, lawyers, interpreters, and social activists.

My observation in different European and international LGBT seminars and conferences for activists and academics shows that to be supported by advisers, asylum seekers may first need to prove their “gayness” to them. Some LGBT asylum activists think they need to protect the “real gay” asylum seekers and increase their chance of being granted asylum by excluding the “fake” ones from their supportive systems. They can be suspicious that a person who has experienced a sexual or romantic relationship with the other sex may just “lie” about their attraction to same-sex people to take advantage of the asylum system (Peyghambarzadeh, 2019). As a result, the possibility of bisexuality among asylum seekers is often ignored in the discussions around seeking asylum based on sexual orientation. This bi-erasure in the asylum process can result not only from bi-erasure in the heterosexual society, but also from bi-erasure in the gay and lesbian communities. As the coaxers, coaches, and coercers, some monosexual asylum activists, irrespective of their monosexual identity, may reproduce this binary understanding of sexual orientation and look for static or “pure” gay and lesbian identities, desires, and relationship histories. As Shakhsari (2014b) explains, refugee law defines and sanctions a homonormative “immutable” gay identity, which is reproduced by diasporic queer organisations that try to coach the LGBT asylum seekers.

The narratives that asylum seekers use in telling the stories of their sexual orientations are shaped in interaction with advisors. As Plummer explains, “while stories direct us to what is told, narratives tell us how stories are told” (2013, p. 210). Narratives are cultural resources that make negotiation of meaning possible. In each context or framework, dominant narratives provide space for specific stories to be told and understood (Shuman, 2012). Dominant narratives that “silence other voices and render other stories invisible, unreal or unauthentic ... might also ‘fix’ one identity, at the expense of other possibilities” (Woodiwiss, 2017, p. 14). Narratives enable us to make sense of our lives, but some people do not have access to “easily available stories” to explain their experiences (Woodiwiss, 2017, p. 23). The narrative of the gay asylum seeker has been accepted since 1980s, but being bisexual still can be considered an invalid reason to seek asylum. Consequently, asylum activists and lawyers may advise bisexual applicants to “perform” gayness in their asylum application to increase their chance of being recognised as a “refugee”. For instance, Bi UK’s (2015) open letter to the parliament mentions that several bisexual asylum seekers in the United Kingdom have received this advice. In addition, multiple subordinate-group

identities that do not fit the proto-typical individual categories may face invisibility in historical, cultural, political, and legal dominant narratives, which can lead to intersectional invisibility (Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008). Bisexual asylum seekers' intimate rights are violated because they are invisible due to their multiple subordinate-group identities. Positioned at the intersection of different inequality systems, including heteronormativity, homonormativity, monosexism, colonialism, and nationalism, it is hard for them to tell their stories and for their audiences to understand and accept them as their stories do not fit the prototypical normative narratives.

Due to mononormative common assumptions, bisexual individuals may pass as heterosexual or gay if they passively or actively “do not use doings, sayings, and material clues to assume membership” of bisexual communities (Maliepaard, 2017, p. 328). They may feel pressured to live a double closet life, as a harm-reduction strategy based on their experiences and expectations of discrimination and lack of acceptance, not only in heterosexual society but also in the gay and lesbian communities (McLean, 2001). This sexual identity-management strategy can result in invisibility of bisexuality. While bisexual asylum seekers may have had to pass as heterosexual to survive in their home countries, they may feel pressured to seek asylum as gay or lesbian to increase their chances of being granted asylum. Asylum seekers who are running away from the regulatory systems of their “home” countries have to perform a “new form of regulation” according to “norms of international refugee regimes and the transitory and destination ‘host states” (Shakhsari, 2014a, p. 99).

Although the asylum law originally was defined to protect European citizens, the UNHCR protocol 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees expanded this right to other citizens, as well (UNHCR, 1992). Nowadays, most of the asylum seekers who seek protection based on their sexual orientation are citizens of the so-called “non-Western” countries who seek asylum in the Western European and North American countries. This has contributed to reproduction of the colonial orientalist dichotomy of the backward “East” and progressive “West” (Keely, 2001). As narrators, asylum seekers have to decontextualize their experiences to make their stories understandable for their listeners (Günthner, 2004). Most asylum seekers have to express their sexual orientation with modern “Western” concepts, and sometimes with the medium of an interpreter to be understandable and valid for the case officers. However, they may have a completely different understanding of sexuality in their own culture and language. They are supposed to tell how they have felt and experienced “gayness” in different periods of their lives based on a stereotypical understanding of a “Western” gay individual. Despite diversity within LGBTQ communities, decision-makers have presumptions about queer lifestyle. For instance, it is common to ask the asylum seekers about the gay “scene”, assuming all gay people share the same interest in the host country, and the applicants should be interested in doing this and in practising their “freedom” in this new

“safe” country (Shuman & Bohmer, 2014). Asylum seekers’ claims might be rejected because they are not familiar with the terms and definitions used in Western European and North American countries. This can be harder for applicants such as bisexual asylum seekers, whose sexual orientation is less discussed in society in general. For example,

an applicant in Finland changed his claim from homosexual to bisexual, immediately after he married a woman. Although in the interview he repeatedly pointed out that he is not homosexual, but bisexual, and he held the difference between these two orientations very significant, he did not know the right term for bisexuality, at the time of writing his application. This was not found to be credible and his claim was rejected in 2010.

(Jansen & Spijkerboer, 2011, p. 59)

Vogl (2013) shows how refugees’ stories are assessed based on accidental narrative criteria. She mentions the series of accidents that have an impact on the assessment of these story, including the accident of the decision-makers who are assigned to the cases, their perceptions of reality, and their expectations of the storytelling process. These expectations are under the influence of the common and culturally accepted stories told in each society. When these stories do not fit the expected narrative, asylum seekers can be in danger of not being believed and consequently not being protected. The asylum process is part of an international system that decides who deserves to be saved and whose life does not matter (Shakhsari, 2014a). As gatekeepers of the national borders, case officers try to assess the asylum stories to find “real gays” as members of particular social groups, with credible cases based on their limited understanding of the country of origin situation.

Membership of a particular social group (PSG)

In religious or political cases, applicants’ opinions or their future plans do not matter. They do not even have to be a member of a group; being perceived by society as such and consequently having a “well-founded fear of persecution” is enough for them to be recognized as a refugee. However, referring to 1951 UN Refugee Convention, sexual orientation-based asylum seekers can be asked to prove membership of a clearly defined group with a common “immutable” characteristic, and being discriminated against due to membership of that particular group, not just being a victim of a single crime (Bennett, 1999; Zilli & Hooper, 2016).

In addition, what has been criminalized in most countries is same-sex sexual conduct rather than having a specific sexual orientation (Mendos, 2019), and the UNHCR (1992) handbook considers the existence of such a law as a threat to life or freedom and defines it as a form of persecution. On the other hand, the UNHCR guideline (UNHCR, 2012) and many

regional and national guidelines in Western European or North American countries prevent officers from asking questions about sex, and explicit sex materials cannot be accepted as supportive documents. Instead, officers are supposed to ask questions about feeling and identity, so while applicants can be persecuted for same-sex act, they have to prove that they identify as “gay” to be able to seek asylum.

Interviews with activists and lawyers in different European countries revealed that the decisions of some European migration offices are based on heteronormative and cisnormative dichotomies of “heterosexual vs. homosexual” and “man vs. woman”, and the stereotypical assumption that bisexual do not have an “overwhelming and irreversible” desire to engage in sexual relations with a person of the same sex. Hetero-/homosexuality is seen as a stable, normal situation, trans and intersex individuals are pathologized, and bisexual individuals can solve their problems by “choosing” to live as a heterosexual (Jansen & Spijkerboer, 2011). Since the case officers are looking for a “gay” person with a stable identity, it can be hard for them to consider a bisexual applicant with a fluid sexual orientation as a member of a particular group. They have expectations about a typical gay or lesbian applicant, but to develop stereotypes about bisexual asylum seekers, first they need to recognise bisexuality as a separate and valid sexual orientation (Marcus, 2018). For instance, a Chinese bisexual man’s asylum claim was rejected in Australia since the tribunal did not consider bisexuality as a separate sexual orientation, but looked at it as half homosexuality and half heterosexuality. The tribunal wrote:

By stressing at the hearing that he is bisexual, the Applicant has not satisfied the Tribunal that he is reconciled to homosexual activity, lifestyle or even social association, or that he has any kind of preternatural homosexual identity or tendencies. It seems to the Tribunal that if this case were about political opinion, it would be as if the Applicant were saying that, at heart, he was a little bit disposed towards democracy but also eager to support authoritarianism; *if it were about religion, it would be as if the applicant, at heart, were a little bit Christian and a little bit atheist*. There is significant equivocation in the Applicant’s evidence and it goes against him.

(Rehaag, 2009, p. 13, emphasis added)

When an applicant has experienced relationships with people of more than one sex, the case officers may assume that either their same-sex relationships or the other-sex relationships were sham relationships. As a result, the bisexual applicants may lose their chance of being granted asylum (Marcus, 2018). For instance, in the United Kingdom, the Home Office claimed that Orashia Edwards’ two-year relationship with his boyfriend in the United Kingdom was a sham relationship, since he had previously been married to a woman (Senzee, 2015). In a similar case in the United States, the immigration

judge decided that Ray Fuller was not in danger despite providing evidences of being physically attacked and injured due to his same-sex relationship in his country. It seems that the judge was not aware of the definition of bisexuality as she wrote in her decision that Fuller could not be bisexual because he has been married to a woman previously (Marcus, 2018). In several European countries such as Austria, the Netherlands, Finland, and Germany, applicants who used to be married to someone of the other sex or had children were rejected (Jansen & Spijkerboer, 2011). Rehaag (2009) mentions rejection of several bisexual asylum seekers' cases in Canada for the same reason. In some of these cases, the decision-makers told applicants that they had entered into same-sex relationships because they did not have access to the other-sex partners, or it has been only a "youthful phase". In the United Kingdom, Orashia Edwards was told he had been experimenting in his two-year relationship with his boyfriend (Senzee, 2015). These assumptions can result from the common binegative believe that bisexuality is just a phase, not a valid, separate sexual orientation.

The fact that decision-makers assume the applicants' sexual orientation by referring to their current or past sexual or romantic relationships shows that they define sexual orientation only in the mononormative binary of heterosexual versus gay. However, sometimes asylum authorities may challenge this binegative assumption in the appeal process. For instance, a Federal Court's decision in Canada in 2004 criticised the adjudicator for not considering the fact that if the applicant were not lesbian, she could be bisexual and even if she were not involved in a same-sex relationship anymore, she could still be in danger due to her previous same-sex relationship. According to the Federal Court:

The claimant feared returning to Hungary because her former common law husband had repeatedly assaulted her after he discovered that she had entered into a relationship with another woman. The adjudicator concluded that the claimant was not a lesbian and no longer involved in a same-sex relationship. The Federal Court concluded that the adjudicator committed an error by omitting to consider the very real possibility that the claimant was bisexual.

(LaViolette, 2015, p. 10)

Credibility

Different studies show that asylum decisions are arbitrary and based on what seems reasonable to case officers based on their limited knowledge about sexual orientations and the country of origin (Bohmer & Shuman, 2007; Millbank, 2005, 2009; Murray, 2014). For example, a bisexual female applicant from Ukraine was rejected because the tribunal made assumptions about how many unsuccessful relationships someone could normally have. The tribunal wrote that, "While it is not impossible for someone to be

bi-sexual it is, on the balance of probabilities, not plausible for the claimant to make three unsuccessful relationships” (Berg & Millbank, 2009, p. 213). In another case, a Canadian adjudicator found it difficult to believe that an 18-year-old female applicant had not been sexually active in Canada because she used to be sexually active when she was younger. According to the adjudicator:

She [says she] is underage to go to gay clubs and she is busy with going to school. It is difficult to believe how a person sexually active with a male and two females from the age of 14 is living a celibate life now.
(Rehaag, 2009, p. 13)

This expectation can result from the over-sexualisation of young bisexual women. The adjudicator also assumed that the level of applicant’s sexual activity could not change over time or in different situations.

Country of origin information

Case officers are supposed to assess the risk based on country of origin information (COI) documents, which are written by the embassies of Western European or North American countries in the home country of the applicant or by human rights organisations. These documents are usually mostly about gay men, with little written about women or bisexual individuals, which impacts the asylum decisions (Jansen & Spijkerboer, 2011).

Asylum seekers have to prove having a “well-founded fear of return”. Countries where the law does not criminalise same-sex sexual conduct or the law has not been implemented for a long time can be called “safe countries”. Consequently, asylum seekers can be sent back to their home countries and be asked to seek state protection or move to another area where people do not know them. In the abovementioned case in Canada in 2004 about a Hungarian asylum seeker, although the Federal Court accepted that the asylum seeker could be at danger due to her previous experience of same-sex relationships, in the end it agreed with the adjudicator that the applicant could seek protection from the Hungarian state instead of seeking protection from the Canadian state. The Federal Court wrote:

The Federal Court was however satisfied that the adjudicator’s conclusion that adequate state protection was available in Hungary to abused women and to gays and lesbians should not be disturbed.

(LaViolette, 2015, p. 10)

The current asylum regime is based on a distinction between safe countries, which can protect their citizens, and those that cannot or are not willing to do so, and the assumption that Western European and North American countries can “save” people of colour from the persecution of their governments.

The relationship between Western European and North American countries and the country of origin can play a huge role in recognising the asylum seeker's fear and defining whether their country is safe (Keely, 2001).

Over the course of the past few decades, there have been ongoing debates among politicians and media of the countries from which sexual orientation-based asylum seekers flee, and those that accept these asylum seekers. In these nationalist postcolonial discursive debates, for anti-imperialist politicians and media on one hand, "gayness" is the result of "Westernization" of "Eastern" countries and a threat to their local culture. Gay people are seen as the "other" and it is thought that national identity should be defined through excluding them. On the other hand, for Western European and North American politicians and media, homophobia is a sign of backwardness of "non-Western" countries, rather than a problem that has to be addressed among their citizens (Symons, Altman, & Norm, 2015).

Hide or seek

In many cases, asylum seekers not only have to prove their sexual orientation, but also that it has been discovered by others and that they are no longer able to hide it. Disclosure of sexual orientation does not always happen because the person has been seen during a sexual act with someone from the same sex. Sometimes families can become suspicious about a person's sexual orientation simply because they have not married by a certain age (Shuman & Bohmer, 2014).

Although the UNHCR guidelines (UNHCR, 2012) reject the discretion argument, it is common to suggest to asylum seekers that they should hide their sexual orientation in order to be able to live safely in their home countries (Keenan, 2012). This "solution" can be offered more to bisexual applicants who, according to some case officers, can "choose" to deny their attraction to their same sex. This can be related to invisibility of bisexual individuals in relationship with the other sex and their possibility of passing as heterosexual. For example:

in a case of a bisexual Iranian the court in Austria believed he had "homosexual experiences", but decided that these were not so deeply engraved in his sexual orientation, that it would be impossible for him to live in a heterosexual relationship.

(Jansen & Spijkerboer, 2011, p. 34)

Jansen (2013) argues that asking asylum seekers to hide their sexual orientation is limiting them from exercising their human rights. According to her, the fact that they have to hide their sexual orientation to be safe means that they are in danger. She suggests considering what could happen to them if others know about their sexual orientation in their home countries. By

asking bisexual asylum seekers to hide their same-sex sexual conduct and their sexual orientation-based identity in their private spaces, their right to express their identity is denied.

Is the European asylum system becoming more bi-inclusive?

Jansen's (2019) new study indicates that the chance of bisexual asylum seekers being recognised as refugees has increased in the Netherlands compared with the result of a previous European study (Jansen & Spijkerboer, 2011). While Jansen and Spijkerboer's (2011) research in different European countries including the Netherlands was mainly based on interviews with lawyers and activists in different organisations, in her recent study Jansen (2019) has analysed the asylum decisions which were made in 2015 and 2016 in the Netherlands. Although there were only 7 bisexual cases among 40 LGBT cases that Jansen reviewed, she concluded that "no examples of stereotypes concerning bisexuals were found in these files" (Jansen, 2019, p. 46). While previous studies showed that some case officers assumed bisexual applicants were not in danger due to their sexual orientation, this study did not find any evidence of rejection of an asylum seeker as a result of questioning their bisexual asylum stories. However, similar to other gay, lesbian, and trans asylum seekers, bisexual asylum seekers' requests have been denied for various reasons – for instance, due to late disclosure of sexual orientation in the asylum application process. In addition, Jansen and Spijkerboer (2011) reveal that case officers were discussing sexual orientation in the binary of homosexual versus heterosexual. However, Jansen (2019) shows that case officers have used the word "bisexual" and "bisexuality" as well. For example, some asylum seekers have been asked: "Are you homosexual or bisexual?" (Jansen, 2019, p. 54). However, Jansen (2019) indicates that the number of bisexual asylum seekers is still lower than the number of gay, lesbian, and trans asylum seekers. Furthermore, as Jansen and Spijkerboer (2011) demonstrate, there have been significant differences between asylum policies of various European countries. Consequently, more studies are needed to see whether the situation has improved in other European countries as well.

It seems that as the bisexual movement is becoming stronger in different countries, the telling and understanding stories of bisexual asylum seekers are becoming easier. The narrative provided by social movements can help individuals to find a name for their personal experiences, connect it with collective experiences, and engage in political actions (Riessman, 1993). In addition to that, as Plummer (2013) mentions, stories are used by social movements and campaigners to help audiences to hear different voices and to sympathise with marginalised groups. Vogl (2013, p. 66) argues that "stories told by or about marginalized or 'outsider' groups can be used to challenge the exclusion of these groups from the law protection".

Conclusion

Most of the previous studies that mention bisexual asylum seekers are based on analysing the immigration office's decisions (Hooper, 2016; Rehaag, 2009; Sin, 2015; Vogler, 2016). There are also a few studies that are based on the experiences of experts in Europe (Jansen & Spijkerboer, 2011) and legal advisers in the United States (Vogler, 2016). These studies focus on how bi-negative attitudes in the assessment of the asylum cases result in the invisibility of bisexual asylum seekers. More studies are needed to collect the asylum stories from the perspective of bisexual asylum seekers in different stages of the asylum process and in various countries.

In this chapter, I have discussed the construction of dominant narratives of sexual orientation in the interactions between asylum seekers and other involved stakeholders in the asylum process. These narratives reflect a mononormative understanding of sexuality due to dominance of the mononormative narratives not only in the heterosexual societies but also in LGBTQ communities. As a result, bisexual asylum seekers feel pressured to reproduce these mononormative narratives in their asylum stories to increase their chance of being granted asylum. This results in bisexual people being limited in exercising their intimate citizenship rights, particularly the rights to freely engage in sexual activities and relationships, choose one's partner(s), and discover, define and express one's sexual identity. Even bisexual individuals who have already been granted asylum may live in fear of being accused of lying about their same-sex attraction if their previous or current relationships with other-sex partners were to be discovered. They can be not only afraid of being questioned by the authorities of the "host" country, but also of being rejected by the LGBT communities of the host country, as well as the diasporic LGBT communities of their "home" country in the host country. Consequently, even after being granted asylum, bisexual individuals may feel pressured to hide their current relationships with their other-sex partners. As a result, their partners may lose the right to remain in the "host" country or the right to family reunion if they are still in their "home" country. In this context, bisexual stories of individuals who have sought asylum based on their sexual orientation may remain untellable forever.

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Note

- 1 We do not even have information about the percentage of bisexual individuals in the countries where most of the LGTB asylum seekers are heading towards.

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3 The bisexual movement in the Netherlands

Developments and experiences of key bi activists since the 1990s

Emiel Maliepaard

Introduction

In 1993, Eadie argued that bisexual safe spaces or communities are necessary for three interrelated reasons: first, they should be free from oppressive (read: mononormative) regimes and social groups; second, they should be free from fear and anxiety; and third, they should be spaces in which to share similar experiences and set agendas for bisexual activism. Studies from the United Kingdom suggest that bisexual spaces, and by extension bisexual communities, are safe spaces for bisexual people that also provide a sense of belonging and a feeling of home (Bowes-Catton, Barker, & Richards, 2011; Voss, Browne, & Gupta, 2014).

While demarcated gay and lesbian spaces exist – for instance, bars, clubs, saunas, and gay and lesbian community organisations – it has been argued that no such spaces exist for bisexual people (Hemmings, 2002; see also Maliepaard, 2020). In the absence of structural and demarcated bisexual spaces, activities organised by bisexual organisations can be understood as temporary “homes” for bisexual people (Bowes-Catton et al., 2011), or even as “bitopias” (Formby, 2017). It has been suggested that temporary events such as the BiCon bisexual conference, a multiday event consisting of workshops, seminars, panel discussions, and parties, and BiFest, a one-day bisexual festival comprising workshops, seminars, and a final party, are the bisexual equivalent of structural and demarcated meeting spaces for gay men and lesbians (Voss, Browne, & Gupta, 2014).

A Dutch qualitative study (n=31) concluded that most bisexual participants were unaware of national bisexual organisations in the Netherlands: not one participant mentioned a local bisexual group (Maliepaard, 2017). Nevertheless, the Netherlands has a history of bisexual activism, including organisations such as Stichting Bisexualiteit Nederland (Dutch Bisexuality Foundation) and Landelijk Netwerk Biseksualiteit (LNBi, or Dutch Bisexual Network). While the former was dissolved many years ago, the latter merged with other LGBT+ organisations only in 2019, after being there for bisexual and other plurisexual people in the Netherlands for more than 25 years.

Furthermore, in the 1990s and early 2000s, various local organisations existed that organised support groups, social groups, and activities for bisexual people, particularly in major Dutch cities such as Amsterdam, The Hague, Rotterdam, Utrecht, and Nijmegen, but also in various smaller cities and regions. By 2019, however, only four organisations – in Amsterdam, Nijmegen, Arnhem, and the province of South Holland – were organising monthly meetings. Thus, we are witnessing an impoverishment of the bisexual landscape in the Netherlands.

This chapter provides a predominantly historical overview of developments in the Dutch bisexual movement on the basis of life history interviews with nine key figures with extensive experience in the movement (Maliepaard, 2019). All the interviewees had contributed to one national bi organisation (the LNBi) in various capacities, and most had also contributed to local organisations for bisexual people.

Bisexual communities?

Formby (2017) differentiates between four types of LGBT communities: (1) spatial communities; (2) cultural communities; (3) imagined communities; and (4) personal communities. The first category refers to the importance of the geographical proximity of people with certain common characteristics who form a community (*Gemeinschaft*). Examples are neighbourhoods, villages, or indeed gay ghettos such as the Castro in San Francisco, Kemptown in Brighton, and the Marais in Paris. Cultural communities refer to communities with which people identify through shared meanings and identities. They provide people with a sense of belonging and a feeling of home. There is an “in-group” and an “out-group” – in this case, bisexual and other plurisexual people versus monosexual people. As Formby argues, this type of community may overlap with spatial communities, as interactions between group members are important for creating shared meanings and identities. Imagined communities are based on Anderson’s (2006) seminal work on nationalism, where he argues that communities exist in the minds of individuals and not necessarily in personal interactions between community members. Regarding LGBT+ imagined communities, one can argue that the idea that all non-heterosexual people are part of the rainbow family is one example of such a community (e.g. Ferreira, 2014). Finally, personal communities refer to personal networks of like-minded people. This type of community relies on networks of friends and acquaintances, and may function as a support group and at least give members a sense of community. A well-known example is the concept of “families of choice”. Formby’s typology is used to assess whether the bisexual activists in this study felt that they were part of a bisexual community and, if so, how this community might be described.

Monro (2015) discusses the experiences of organised bisexual communities in the United Kingdom. These communities can be understood

as created by bisexual people and their allies to provide space to be bisexual, connect with other bisexuals, find refuge from heteronormativity and mononormativity, and set political agendas (see also Van Lisdonk & Keuzenkamp, 2017). This resembles the need for bisexual spaces pointed out by Eadie (1993), and stresses the function of bisexual communities as safe spaces for visitors/participants. Using Bourdieu's concept of habitus, Monro (2015, p. 95) further argues that a bisexual community could be understood as

a historically grounded set of cultural and social practices (including norms and values) which the individual takes for granted and then, by default, reproduces in interaction with other people and the wider environment.

Well-known practices include the aforementioned BiFest and BiCon, as well as monthly gatherings of local bi organisations. Norms and values mentioned by Monro (2015) include, for example, support for sexually diverse identities and expressions, the importance of consent, anti-commercialism, anti-hierarchism, high levels of emotional expression, and an emphasis on (mutual) care. Monro's conceptualisation of bisexual communities in terms of habitus is used in this study to analyse the activities, political efforts, norms, and values of the Dutch bisexual movement, particularly the LNBi.

Methods

This study is based on interviews with nine key figures. I defined key people as people who had held board positions in the LNBi for at least five years and/or were recognised within bisexual organisations as icons of bisexual activism. In total, eight of the nine had held board positions; the other participant had not formally occupied a board position, but had volunteered with the LNBi for over a decade. Most participants had also volunteered in local organisations – for instance, as coordinators of local social groups (“circles”) for bisexual people.

The participants (all aged 50+) were recruited via purposeful sampling to participate in life history interviews. This research method prioritises the experiences and meaning-making of participants. People think in stories, speak in narratives, and make sense of life via stories (Atkinson, 2002). In life history interviews, the participant is in the lead, and the researcher is mainly there to guide the interview. The interviews lasted between 67 and 113 minutes, averaging around 90 minutes.

The interviews were analysed manually, using a predominantly inductive approach aligned with the principles of the life history interview – that is, prioritising the meaning-making and experiences of the research participants. All interview extracts have been translated by the author; all names are pseudonyms.

Participating in the Dutch bisexual movement

Most participants had already participated in the Dutch gay movement before entering the bisexual movement. Sometimes they had done so as visitors to events, but often in more activist and/or organising roles. Most of them had felt *comfortable* or *at ease* in the lesbian and gay movement; however, they had not felt *at home* there. This is an important distinction, and participants mainly attributed the difference to the presence of mononormative assumptions in the gay movement, which made them feel different and sometimes excluded, particularly if they were involved in different-sex relationships. They experienced ignorance and even mistrust from gay and lesbian people. Consequently, the key figures had looked for organisations or events to meet other bisexual people, to share understandings and experiences, and to socialise without worrying about how others would respond to their different-sex partners. They were not looking for bisexual safe spaces, but for people and organisations that did not embrace or express mononormative assumptions.

Their careers in bisexual organisations had progressed quite steeply: They came into contact with the organisations and then often took up board positions within one year. This shows their determination to become active members of the bisexual movement, as well as the vulnerability of that movement, which was always in need of new board members, as it was difficult to find enough people to run organisations and activities. While the LNBI was originally an association with approximately 200 members, it was difficult to create an active bisexual community (see next section).

This determination and vulnerability alike can also be observed when we look at the key figures' motivations for taking up board positions:

Emiel: What was your motivation to become active?

Harry: Also to do something in return. We found a community in which we felt at home. Next, it was a shame that this community was at risk of collapsing. No activities were organised, and we felt it was important to organise activities. And of course, to meet new people. But also to give people that same spark that we experienced when we first encountered this community. Furthermore, empowerment and recognition. Recognition of the issues you face yourself. And then meeting all kinds of people who have the same things, and you're alike. Yeah, that is really nice. Also people who are shy when first visiting a BiCon and flourish during that conference and dare to interact with other people.

This participant reflects upon his motivations for taking up a board position in the LNBI. Two main themes can be identified from this excerpt: (1) empowering and supporting fellow bisexuals, and providing a space to socialise; and (2) ensuring the continuity of the Dutch bisexual movement. To start with the first theme, all the participants had been looking for a

space to meet other bisexual people, and had found a (temporary) home for themselves. They wanted to create a home for other bisexual people, not necessarily to *help* people but to empower them and provide opportunities to socialise (see Bowes-Catton et al., 2011; Toft & Yip, 2018; Voss, Browne, & Gupta, 2014). Harry's words are telling: it was really valuable for him to see a shy person visiting an activity such as Holland BiCon and finding the strength and courage to start approaching and socialising with other visitors. As another interviewee, Kate, noted, while the activities of the bisexual movement might seem small and sometimes even insignificant, they meant a lot to bisexual people in the Netherlands, who felt empowered by participating in activities and events.

Second, the excerpt shows that Harry decided to step in because the bisexual community he had found was at risk of collapsing. This was after the LNBi had organised the first EuroBiCon in 2001. The majority of the board members had played key roles in organising this conference, alongside organising regular activities for LNBi members, as well as running their own professional and private lives. Two other participants also mentioned the possible collapse of the bisexual movement as *the* reason for them stepping up and taking on a board position. One of these, Ingrid, reflected on this negative motivation and argued that it had put all the responsibility on her and the others who had stepped in, contributing to the vulnerability of the Dutch bisexual movement: "If I don't do it, nobody does it, so let's do it. And that is a, how to say, the reality for many volunteers in the bisexual movement. And this motivation is energy-consuming".

A third theme behind stepping up and becoming active was the desire to increase the visibility of bisexuality – within LGBTQ+ organisations, in the social domain, but also in society as a whole. This motivation was only mentioned explicitly by one participant, but it lay behind in many of the activities and actions instigated by bisexual activists. Remarkably, no participant discussed explicitly political motives, such as civil rights activism to change legislation or policies, as a reason to participate in the Dutch bisexual movement.

Bisexual movement as manifold communities?

Size and waves

Ross and colleagues (2018) conclude that bisexual support groups or communities are a rarity. Nevertheless, in the United Kingdom, studies have found that bisexual communities exist and can play an important role in the lives of bisexual people. When asked to describe the bisexual movement or community in the Netherlands, participants mainly reflected on the LNBi.

Participants described the LNBi as a small organisation (200 members) with about 15 active members. These were the board members and a few others who organised activities and ensured the continuity of the association.

They got help from a few others, who would lend a hand at events organised by the active group or help to organise smaller events. The board was not only responsible for drafting policies and governing the organisation; its members were also the people who actually did the “dirty work”. The situation in local organisations was the same.

The Dutch bisexual movement was based on do-it-yourself (DIY) activism, in both national and local bisexual organisations. None of the participants spoke about activists being employed by an organisation; unlike in gay and lesbian organisations, all the work was done by volunteers:

Emiel: Regarding the bisexual community, could you please elaborate on that community in the days when you were involved with it? I mean, when you were an active member?

Mike: We had a group of several dozen people. Some were more active than others, people came and went, but in all those years it was a few dozen ... Some would say ‘I don’t want to take part in a board or be explicitly labelled as volunteer, but if you need me you can always approach me. Just give me a call and I could possibly organise a workshop’. So these things are interesting for an annual event such as an Autumn Party or a BiVak [naturist camping weekend], or specific events where they want to contribute and not only fool around.

Mike had been active for over ten years in various roles, mostly in board positions in the LNBi. He confirmed the view that the bisexual community or movement consisted of a small group of active members and a small number of others who could be approached to give a workshop, cook at a camping weekend, or help to organise a small event. What is even more interesting is the dynamic he describes in this extract: people come and go. Other participants also reported that people would participate in a bisexual community (often as visitors) for a couple of years, become empowered, and finally leave the bisexual group and stop visiting the activities organised by these organisations. This shows that the bisexual movement did not manage to build a sustainable or even a strong community in people’s minds, but often was experienced and used as a (temporary) support group. It is quite likely that these organisations and activities were important to support and empower visitors, but when they felt at ease with their bisexuality, they would stop visiting the events and activities organised by bisexual organisations:

Eveline: I believe I never got a complete view of the bisexual movement. The bi community in the Netherlands is large and diverse. In general people were part of the LNBi [community] for one or two years, they found their home. And after their coming out, you rarely saw them again in the bi group. If I think a bit more, most people were a little bit older, over 30, and they discovered they were attracted to more than one sex or gender. Because they struggled with it, they came to an LNBi event to

overcome this struggle. A few of them who enjoyed these events stayed and discovered their true selves. They still struggle a bit, but at least still want to be active. So that's always quite a small group of people.

This quotation from Eveline's interview confirms the points made above, but also reveals the difference between the theoretical bisexual community – conceptualised as *all* people who are emotionally and/or sexually attracted to people of more than one sex or gender – and the actual community, which was built around a small group of active people. The time aspect is also interesting: People only participated for one or two years. This observation is not only valid for visitors, but also for volunteers and to a certain extent for the key figures themselves. The key figures were also active for certain (albeit more extensive) periods of time, then left the movement and returned a few years later in different positions.

Returning to Formby (2017), I would argue that the concept of cultural communities is especially applicable to the LNBI and the Dutch bisexual movement. The bisexual activists themselves found a sense of belonging in the LNBI by interacting with other visitors, organisers, and/or activists. In the words of Schatzki (2008), people only coexist – they relate and position themselves in relation to others and the social world – by engaging in shared practices (see also Maliepaard, 2017). Nevertheless, due to its small size, the national bisexual movement easily became a set of personal communities: Most of the key activists really got to know each other and became friends (or acquaintances after leaving the LNBI, as most of them now lived in different areas of the country, or even abroad). In contrast, local organisations often started from personal communities, then contributed to more intense and extended personal communities by organising circles (see below). For instance, Ernst revealed that his participation in a local circle resulted in long-lasting friendships with other bisexual people, even after people had moved to various other parts of the country.

Activities

The LNBI organised a wide variety of activities, such as the annual Spring Party, the annual Autumn Party, (naturist) camping weekends, coming-out weekends for people who were struggling with their bisexuality, weekends for bi men, lectures on bi-specific topics, workshops to educate others about bisexuality, a quarterly magazine, the annual Holland BiCon (2009–2015), and two EuroBiCons (2001, 2016). Most of these activities were primarily meant to empower other bisexuals, and only secondarily to create a (temporary) bisexual community.

In light of the size of the bisexual movement (or bisexual communities), it may be no surprise that most activities were organised by LNBI board members. As Kate concluded:

Yes, the board was very much an organising board. I would be delighted with a new bisexual movement in which the board would mainly manage special committees. A board who do not organise activities themselves but who, from a distance, manage the organising committees.

As the LNBI was a small organisation, and the board members organised at least the majority of activities and events, little attention was paid to political issues such as the representation of bisexuality in political domains:

Emiel: So I don't hear much about the political element of bi activism. Was that less of a priority?

Eveline: No, but we mainly focused on COC, we were quite critical of them ... Yes, and also because COC was the main partner of the ministry. The LNBI, together with a few other organisations, were really the smaller ones, so we did not have much to say. It was of vital importance to have COC on our side. So that really was a political objective of the LNBI.

As Eveline argued, the LNBI and other LGBT organisations in the Netherlands were quite small in size, and were not listened to by the government or other institutions. It was important to create awareness among people working at COC (which originally stood for Cultuur en Ontspanningscentrum, or the Center for Culture and Leisure) – the oldest and most professionalised LGBT organisation in the Netherlands – because bisexuality was often neglected and sometimes even erased by this organisation in favour of the normalisation of homosexuality (Van Alphen, 2017) and a politics of difference (cf. Turai, 2018 on the tensions between bisexual people and Hungarian LGBT organisations). One important milestone, according to the activists, is the fact that bisexual people are now explicitly mentioned in COC's statutes as a target group alongside gay men and lesbians.

Later on, this political representation of the LNBI and lobbying for bi-specific issues became a true priority, as the LNBI shifted from an association (i.e. a membership organisation) to a foundation (without members). This change meant that the LNBI became more of a lobbying organisation that in theory would represent all bisexual people, rather than only its roughly 200 members. This was a wish come true for several participants, who had felt the pressure to keep organising activities for members who were often critical of the organisation but did not organise events themselves.

Dependency on just a few people means that priorities can be set on the basis of the personal preferences, principles, and convictions of these active members, and can easily shift as the active membership changes (see also Calvo & Trujillo, 2011; Ferreira, 2014). Furthermore, it also means that it is impossible to initiate and continue activities for different target groups and purposes. For instance, the prioritisation of political representation

and lobbying resulted in a shift from the organisation of community events towards a greater presence at national and local LGBT gatherings. This change resulted in a decline in events that might potentially contribute to community-building and the direct empowerment of bisexual individuals.

Local organisations mainly organised monthly meetings with the aims of socialisation with other bisexual people and mutual empowerment. Two types of organisations can be identified. On one hand, some organisations held monthly meet-ups that were open to all, in ordinary or LGBT bars or in LGBT venues; on the other hand, some groups or “circles” had memberships, and people had to apply to join. Each member of a circle was supposed to host one of these monthly meetings in their private home. Some circles were exclusively for men or women, some were open to all bisexual people irrespective of gender, and one or two were only for youngsters. An exception to this rule was Gobi, an organisation based in Nijmegen, which not only had circles for bisexual men only, women only, and mixed circles, but was also famous nationwide for its annual Autumn Party (*Herfstfeesten*), which attracted people from all over the country. These Autumn Parties were held in the local LGBT venue and were meant to celebrate being bisexual. It is safe to conclude that all these activities were the results of DIY activism.

Norms and values

As Monro (2015) argues, the organised bisexual communities in the United Kingdom probably had much more overlap with kink, BDSM, swingers, or polycommunities compared with mainstream lesbian and gay communities (see also Barker et al., 2012). My study confirms Monro’s conclusion, and shows that BDSM and polyamory in particular were understood to be closer to the bisexual movement compared with lesbian and gay organisations. This was not only because at certain times a substantial proportion of the LNBi’s board members were into BDSM, polyamory, and/or swinging themselves, but also because these scenes or interests were part of the workshops and other activities that constituted the Holland BiCons and other events:

Linda: So we started the Gobi Autumn Parties. I managed to lobby COC – this party was held at the COC venue – to have a true [mixed-gender] darkroom. I was part of a COC discussion group as a representative of Gobi, and these people were like, ‘Yeah, really? Those bisexuals want a darkroom ... that will be a total failure’. ... So about one and a half months later we met again, and they were really eager to learn about the darkroom. I was like, ‘You don’t want to know, it was crowded! People had to wait at the entrance [of the darkroom]’. They were like, ‘Are you kidding?’ Then I explained that such a darkroom meets some demands of bisexual people, and these people need to decide for themselves whether they will participate in it or not, and to what extent.

Linda had been very active in a local organisation – for instance, setting up new circles and coordinating activities. The extract above from her interview reflects sex positivity and a *laissez-faire* attitude to sexuality (see also Chapter 11 in this book): sex should have a place at events, and visitors should be able to choose for themselves whether to participate in more sexualised activities. As the extract reveals, it was a big success, and people had to queue outside the mixed-gender darkroom due to its popularity. Participants also spoke about workshop topics such as BDSM for beginners or ethical polyamory as examples of the interwovenness of bisexuality and other sexual and romantic preferences.

Key activists wanted to be inclusive of all kinds of bisexual people, and to create practices that celebrated diversity among bisexual people:

Mike: We always explicitly mentioned in our oral and written communications that bisexual people exist in many different ways. They all are perfect. They can be monogamous and choose one partner for the rest of their lives. They can be poly and have multiple relationships with men, women, and couples. They can also be part of all kinds of different scenes. Everything is possible. A number of bisexual people did not really agree with that, because they experienced it like we wanted to impose norms and values on them. Some possibly experienced that one type would become dominant over others. We always stressed that this was not the case: everyone is equal.

Mike and other LNBi board members stressed inclusivity in their internal and external communications, and in the activities they organised. They purposefully tried over the years to create a habitus (norms, values, activities, actions) that would be inclusive of, and understood and accepted by all bisexual people. As Mike said, his experience was that not all bisexual people took these norms, values, and activities for granted. A number of bisexual people experienced the activities as *imposing* a particular habitus, and sometimes even contested them because they were scared that one type of bisexuality would become dominant in the practices of the LNBi.

A number of monogamous bisexual people did not feel at ease with the explicit attention to (bi)sexual desire and sex, as they felt this might strengthen stereotypes of bisexual people as promiscuous or hypersexual. Further, as other activists argued, the openness towards non-monogamous sexual practices during these events – and sometimes also afterwards (e.g. if visitors to a BiCon stayed over at an organiser's home to participate in sex parties) – could be an overwhelming experience for newcomers to the bisexual movement or visitors to events. Another key activist, Ernst, suggested that some bisexual people did not join the LNBi's camping weekends because they were naturist events. In other words, not relating to the habitus could result in people ceasing to participate in particular activities, and perhaps in their ceasing to visit activities organised by bisexual organisations altogether.

Reflecting on the evolution of LGBT activism in Spain, Calvo and Trujillo (2011) argue that more conformist or state-oriented LGBT organisations focused on normalisation and love rights (family rights, such as equal marriage), whereas more revolutionary or underground organisations focused on sex rights and sex(uality). Fillieule and Duyvendak (1999) similarly conclude that the “older” and state-oriented gay and lesbian movement in France was more focused on equal treatment and equal rights, instead of campaigning for extra or special treatment. (See also Ferreira, 2014 and Van Alphen 2017 for similar observations on activism in Portugal and the Netherlands respectively.) While the LNBI shifted from a more community-focused organisation to a more politically oriented organisation, its attention to sex and sexuality did not fade away, and seemed to be relatively firmly grounded in the organisation’s activities, norms, and values.

Most participants experienced a space where they could be different and be their true selves. This was not limited to norms and values related to sexuality or relationship diversity. One participant, Chris, discussed the acceptance of people living with autistic spectrum disorder, who in his experience were widely present in the bisexual movement (and the gay and lesbian movement). The emphasis on mutual care, respect, and the empowerment of others was identified as a key value of the bisexual movement. This is no surprise in light of the activists’ aforementioned motivations for taking up key positions in local and national organisations, and the nature of activities such as circles, coming-out weekends, camping activities, and so on. It is also no surprise that bisexual people should interpret bisexual organisations as support groups for people who are struggling with their bisexuality (Maliepaard, 2017; Toft & Yip, 2018).

Finally, for a number of people, the emphasis on empowering other bisexuals also meant a shift away from presenting bisexuals as victims of the mononormative system, lesbian and gay organisations, and others who contributed to the double stigmatisation of bisexual people. At times, they argued, bisexual organisations focused too much on the problems bisexual people may have had in their daily lives, and not enough on the positive sides of bisexuality. As Harry put it:

I don’t know, but when I became part of the bi community, I felt they only talked about problems ... So I really challenged this way of presenting bisexuality. Immediately playing the victim card.

As Gusmano (2017) suggests, it is important for LGBT organisations to acknowledge that the discourse of victimisation and discrimination can obscure the “positive self”. Not only Harry, but also Linda and Eveline, emphasised that they felt it was easier to empower other bisexuals by using a positive approach and embracing the positive self: “We are proudly and happily bisexual! Let’s celebrate it!” As Linda said of people who applied for

membership of a bisexual circle, “Is it a happy bisexual or a sad one? No, we have sad one again. Let’s make them a happy bisexual!”

Reflections and recommendations

The above sections draw a picture of a small bisexual movement, consisting of approximately ten to 15 people at the national level, and similarly small groups/communities at the local level, constituting a small core team, with a group of people that could be approached for minor organisational tasks or to give workshops. At the national level, it becomes clear that the LNBI mainly organised activities for its own members until approximately December 2011, when it became a foundation and prioritised bisexual representation within the wider LGBT movement, government institutions, and research institutes. Because of the LNBI’s limited capacity, its board members constantly needed to choose their priorities and were at risk of exhaustion. It is no surprise that the LNBI witnessed a number of crises – for instance, after organising energy-consuming events such as the EuroBiCons in Rotterdam (2011) and Amsterdam (2016). New activists had to step into an organisation that was already exhausted. It is quite telling that most participants mentioned self-care as their main tip for the new(er) generation(s) of bi activists.

While bisexual organisations in Germany and the United Kingdom seem to have been successful at the national and local levels (EuroBiCon, 2020), this does not apply to bisexual organisations in every European country, as work on Finland (e.g. Lahti, 2019) and Hungary (Turai, 2018) has shown. In the Netherlands, the LNBI announced its dissolution in 2019 after more than 25 years of activism, community-building, and bisexual representation. It is difficult to assess the impact of the LNBI; however, if we look at people’s personal reasons for becoming active in the bisexual movement, it is possible to draw tentative conclusions. These reasons were (1) to empower and support fellow bisexuals, and provide a space for socialising; (2) to ensure the continuity of the Dutch bisexual movement; and (3) to create bivisibility.

To start with the first of these, the LNBI and local organisations contributed to community-building (i.e. fostering personal communities), but above all to empowering and supporting bisexual people by organising activities such as coming-out weekends, camping weekends, BiCon, and local gatherings (the aforementioned circles). While these activities may seem mundane, they contributed to the empowerment of bisexual people, and helped people to explore and accept their bisexuality and sometimes also other aspects of their lives. The majority of participants gave examples of “sad bisexuals” (i.e. bisexual people who struggled with their sexuality or socially) that turned into “happy bisexuals” by participating in activities at national and local levels. It should be said, however, that despite the attempts of key activists and others to create a particular habitus that would be inclusive of

all kinds of bisexual people, members of the LNBI sometimes contested the “imposed” habitus, and were scared that one type of bisexuality or bisexual people would become dominant in the LNBI and its activities.

Second, participants succeeded in keeping the LNBI alive for over 25 years, and other local organisations also had extended lifespans thanks to the efforts of bisexual activists. Nevertheless, as I observed in the introduction, the bi landscape nowadays is impoverished. At the time of writing in 2019, only four cities have monthly meetings, and the organisers regard these meetings as only partially successful. In late summer 2019, a new national organisation was founded: Bi+ Nederland (Bi+ Netherlands). The founders of this organisation all met through activities instigated by the LNBI, in particular the EuroBiCon of 2016.

Third, participants contributed to TV shows, radio interviews, and newspaper articles, and created awareness of bisexuality in LGBT organisations and Dutch national and local politics. While most local organisations and the LNBI no longer exist, this does not mean that individual activists have stopped their efforts to make bisexuality more visible in everyday life; however, this is now more incidental than before, and takes place via social media more often than through other channels.

Recommendations

While conducting this study, I also asked the key activists whether they had any suggestions for the “new” generation of bi activists, and we discussed at length the development (including the highs and lows) of the Dutch bisexual movement. On this basis, I offer three recommendations for existing and future organisations that want to represent plurisexual people and/or create new communities:

1. *Organisations need to strike a balance between the political representation of bisexuality and activities for plurisexual people.* Representation and lobbying are important; however, bisexual and other plurisexual people should be the main focus of these organisations. The empowerment of and support for bisexual people have been a focus in the past and have meant a lot to plurisexual people. Having a visible and strong community will also help political representation and lobbying activities.
2. *Organisations need to professionalise and strengthen their human resources.* Currently, organisations depend on a few individuals or small personal communities of activists. To ensure the continuity of organisations/activities and the wellbeing of activists/volunteers, organisations need to increase their numbers of structural volunteers.
3. *Boards of organisations need to have a clear and positive vision and objectives, which should take the lead; personal objectives and interests need to be subordinate.* This may prevent crises on boards, and ensure that more volunteers will lead the organisation together and share

their responsibilities, instead of putting pressure on one or a few board members. The vision should embrace the “happy bisexual” (the positive self) instead of emphasising the marginalisation of bisexuality and bisexual people.

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4 Monosexual church policies and plurisexual youth cultures

Carol A. Shepherd

Introduction: A conspiracy of silence?

YouGov (2015) revealed in a poll that 49 per cent of young people in the United Kingdom did not identify as 100 per cent heterosexual. In a more recent report, UK anti-bullying organisation Ditch the Label (2017) put the figure at 57 per cent, while the Williams Institute at UCLA (2018) showed an increased tolerance of LGBT people in its Global Acceptance Index. Given these statistics, why do clergy attitudes and church doctrines remain resolutely binary in the face of growing sexual and gender diversity among young people? This is the theoretical question at the heart of this chapter.

Over 30 years ago, Fritz Klein noted in his seminal work on bisexuality, *The Bisexual Option* (1978), that social institutions – including churches – routinely ignored bisexuality in discourses on human sexuality. It seems that in the ensuing three decades, nothing has changed in the church, while both not-for-profit and commercial organisations clamour to compete for the LGBT currency as part of a growing acceptance of sexual minority rights. Indeed, the LGBT marketing consultancy Out Now (2015), in the biggest survey of its kind in 2015, has shown just why both American and European companies are so keen to attract LGBT employees from both a financial and customer loyalty standpoint. Given that both financial support and congregant retention are key considerations for most ecclesiastical organisations – and I speak from my own experience of serving in church leadership – it is perhaps surprising that less attention is paid to the potential financial and sociocultural benefits of extending the table to welcome the full range of LGBT+ identities. Is it truly the case that those who would leave the organisation on principle, on acceptance of LGBT+ congregants, would outnumber those whom such a policy would attract into the church? And even if this were to be the case, what long-term ramifications would such a stance have for the future viability of the church, given that a substantial percentage of the current generation do not identify as exclusively straight?

Despite bisexual people comprising over half of all LGBT people, there appears to be little movement away from binary thinking in the new shift towards affirming discourse within certain Christian denominations. This

represents a colossal own goal on the part of the church, alienating the very youth it is so desperately trying to attract in its attempts to breathe new life into a dying institution. The UK Government's National LGBT Survey (2019) revealed that young people are the most likely to identify as bisexual. It is abundantly clear that neither gender identity nor sexual orientation is viewed as a binary concept in the minds of young people today, a state of play that perplexes church leaders seeking flawed simplicity over nuanced realities to retain existing doctrinal positions. As Yip (2003) notes in his study of the Roman Catholic Church, Christians are changing, but the church itself is not willing to follow suit.

In my previous research into bisexuality in the United Kingdom (Shepherd 2017, 2018), I discovered that only one Christian organisation in the whole of the United Kingdom – North London Metropolitan Community Church – offered a stand-alone pastoral leaflet on bisexuality, and only a handful had mentioned bisexuality within church services. Elsewhere, the orientation was ignored or subsumed within homosexuality. It is thus within this sobering context that I set about considering the situation for (vulnerable) young Christian people with plurisexual identities.

Methods

This chapter chiefly aims to explore some of the theoretical grounds for this apparent conspiracy of silence over bisexuality. To locate this chapter within a European context, I also exemplify the theoretical issues underpinning bisexual Christian erasure with some initial findings from my empirical research into bisexual Christians around Europe, which is being conducted on behalf of the European Forum of LGBT Christian Groups (Shepherd, in press). This project is currently at the data-collection stage and is thus not ready for full analysis. While it does not focus specifically on the 18–24 years age group, the study does feature a significant proportion of college students within this age range.

A survey of existing literature on the bisexual Christian intersection

It would be fair to say that existing literature on the bisexual–Christian intersectional identity is sparse. Besides my own empirical studies of bisexual Christians in the United Kingdom and the United States (Shepherd, 2018), the only considerable body of work to coexist on this intersection is that of UK scholars Andrew Yip and Alex Toft (Toft, 2012, 2014; Yip, 2003; Yip and Toft, 2020)

Beyond Yip, Toft and myself, UK activist Jaime Sommers (2016) has published an autobiographical trade publication, *119: My Life as a Bisexual Christian*. Elsewhere, Levy and Harr (2018), Robinson (2015), Alford-Harkey and Haffner (2014), Hutchins and Williams (2014), Lingwood

(2010) and Kolodny (2000) have touched on the bisexual Christian intersection from a theoretical perspective within chapters in edited volumes or in stand-alone journal articles. Alford-Harkey and Haffner (2014) have written a general, non-academic church resource for those who pastor bisexual Christians in the United States. However, what the majority of such writings on the bisexual Christian experience have in common, as Toft (2012) notes, is that they largely focus on individuals who have moved out of faith communities, so offer little in the way of coping mechanisms and solutions for those who wish to negotiate a position and sense of embodied faith within church organisations.

Of the above authors, only Yip, Toft and myself have undertaken extensive empirical research with bisexual Christians, while my monograph, *Bisexuality in the Western Christian Church: The Damage of Silence* (Shepherd, 2018), based on my doctoral thesis (Shepherd, 2017), is the only work to encompass qualitative research with both church practitioners and their bisexual congregants, and my findings are also discussed in an edited volume by Yip and Toft (2020). Yet, while publishing output is slowly increasing on the bisexual–Christian intersection, it remains authored by a select band of scholars, and this is problematic in a climate where the monosexual discourses of the church are at odds with the plurisexual realities of secular society, as revealed in the social surveys featured in the introduction to this chapter.

This paucity of publishing output on the bisexual Christian intersection is perhaps symptomatic of both the reticence of bisexual Christians to speak out and the unwillingness of the monosexual majority to give voice to the bisexual Christian experience. Yet the voice of the insider is crucial, as Stephen Lingwood (2010) outlines in his important article, “Bi Christian Unitarian: A Theology of Transgression”. Speaking as a queer theologian, Lingwood asserts that more “us” theology is required (bisexual theology written by bisexual people), rather than “them” theology (theology written about bisexual people by straight or gay theologians). The insider view is crucial, given the widespread ignorance of the specific issues faced by bisexual Christians among both clergy and lay people, and also among academics.

This silence on the bisexual Christian experience translates into a lack of support for bisexual Christians within faith communities, as explored by Alex Toft. Toft (2012) demonstrates how bisexual Christians more often than not cease to regularly attend church worship, owing to the lack of welcome afforded them, exclusionary pastoral practices, and ignorance of bisexual identities. Toft (2012) shows that in the vast majority of cases – more than 80 per cent – it is not overt acts of aggression against bisexuals that make them reluctant to be part of worship communities, but the unspoken sense of feeling unwelcome. In other words, the silence on bisexuality as a valid subject for debate or valid identity for a Christian is what drives bisexual Christians away from organised religion. This is also the case within gay-affirming denominations, such as the Metropolitan Community

Church, where gay and lesbian monosexual discourses dominate and serve to exclude plurisexual identities. Toft (2014) shows how this ignorance and wanton silence on the subject within churches leads bisexual people into concealing their sexuality and hiding behind the monosexual privilege that their opposite-sex, *vis-à-vis* same-sex, partner affords them, depending on whether the congregation is straight-affirming or lesbian-and-gay-affirming (but never bi-affirming).

My published body of work (Shepherd 2017, 2018) concurs with Yip and Toft's findings, yet perhaps places more emphasis on the mental wellbeing fallout of this silence on the bisexual Christian intersection, with 88 per cent of the 54 bisexual Christian participants interviewed revealing depressive disorders of various degrees, from generalised anxiety disorders (GAD) to suicide ideation and attempts. While it would be disingenuous to lay the blame for poor mental wellbeing firmly at the door of binegative clergy and institutions – among this particular cohort, there were numerous parallel factors for adverse mental health – nor can the coexistence of a bisexual orientation and poor mental health be ignored.

Theoretical background to bisexual erasure in the church

As indicated above, this chapter seeks to establish the theoretical basis for the stigmatisation of bisexual Christians in the Christian church via themes that have emerged from existing empirical research and theories proposed by queer theologians and academics.

Binary worship of the Holy Trinity

As British theologian Adrian Thatcher (1993, p. 155) notes, “Bisexual people are almost always overlooked in discussions of sexuality”. Is this silence concerning bisexuality deliberate or accidental?

In an academic article, Garrigan (2009, p. 155) poses the following question:

As you sing with the faithful in all times and all places, how often have you sung in terms that were not based on heterosexist binaries – father and mother, male and female? ... How is sexual diversity talked about and otherwise imaged in your worship? How do you recognise the one in every 2000 babies born with ‘indeterminate’ sex organs? How many prayers begin only, ‘Brothers and Sisters?’ How many of the worship leader’s well-meaning remarks class people as ‘gay or straight’, as if they were the only options? How are bisexual people represented in your church, if at all? Are bisexual people mis-portrayed as ‘straight’ if they are in a male–female relationship?

That the church as a whole has made great progress in the acceptance of lesbian and gay individuals over the past ten years cannot be denied,

the Roman Catholic and free evangelical church notwithstanding. In the 18 years since the Netherlands became the first country in Europe to legalise same-sex marriage, we find ourselves today in a situation where 16 out of 44 European countries allow same-sex marriage, albeit only within certain denominations (European Union, 2019). A larger number of European nations still allow LGBT clergy to be ordained, though those countries that oppose marriage equality tend to also impose celibacy on the incumbent priest. In the United Kingdom, same-sex couples may not legally marry in the established Church of England and LGBT clergy must abstain from homosexual acts (Church of England, 1991), though a “don’t ask, don’t tell” approach is widely practised within all but the most conservative dioceses.

It might be assumed that this increasing acceptance of lesbian and gay individuals would mimic the trajectory of public life and automatically extend to those with plurisexual sexualities and non-binary gender identities. It might also be expected that, given bisexual people comprise over 50 per cent of the LGB population (GLAAD, 2016), bisexual people of faith themselves would mobilise to ensure credence is given and rights are extended to this sizeable cohort. Yet this has not been the case. When the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, spoke of the divisions in the Anglican Communion in January 2016 (Welby, 2016), in the run up to the Primates Meeting at Canterbury, these were in relation to “homosexuality” and “same-sex marriage”. No mention was made of either bisexual or transgender Christians. This lack of acknowledgement, even if viewed as a problematic to be solved, is at the heart of the pain and anxiety felt by the majority of bisexual Christians I have interviewed in various research projects, from the west coast of America to the eastern outposts of Europe.

Binary thought systems and bisexual Christian erasure

Is it that bisexual people are not coming forward to tell their stories, as Pew (2013) suggests? Or is it that hierarchical systems and sexual identity politics require the existence of simplistic dichotomies (male/female, gay/straight) to maintain existing power bases, effectively gagging bisexual and transgender “insurgents”? Thatcher (1993, p. 155) refers to the “over-used and over-tidy categories of heterosexual and homosexual”.

At the root of bisexual stigmatisation within the church in the United Kingdom has been the somewhat notorious *Issues in Human Sexuality* (Church of England, 1991) a report conducted by the House of Bishops of the Church of England, the state church in the United Kingdom. Within a 43-page generic document on human sexuality, just one paragraph was devoted to bisexuality, in which bisexual people of faith are basically instructed to exclusively engage in opposite-sex relationships if they cannot be celibate, and to seek counselling for a potential personality disorder. It would also appear to assume adultery as a matter of course on the part of the bisexual Christian. Not only is this deeply offensive to many bisexual Christians, particularly coming from the established Christian church of the United

Kingdom; it also reveals an unambiguous ignorance of what bisexuality actually is. A generally accepted definition of bisexuality agreed by bisexual scholars and activists alike refers to an enduring attraction to people of more than one sex or gender (Alford-Harkey & Haffner, 2014) – no more, no less.

In line with Fritz Klein’s (1978) “non-existence myth”, church leaders appear to be stymied by those outside of the sexuality binary, choosing to ignore bisexuality or demonise bisexual people over their apparent lack of moral integrity – what Kolodny (2000) refers to as the “weapon” used by heterosexual and homosexual people alike to deny bisexual Christians their full rights. In other words, the monosexual majority accuse bisexual people of promiscuity to underline their own moral superiority and exclude bisexual people.

The shadow of polyamory, which is often disproportionately associated with bisexuality, is used to suppress the bisexual voice – generally by those seeking affirmation of “permanent, faithful, stable” same-sex relationships to facilitate acceptance into worship communities. The so-called “slippery slope” argument (Klesse, 2018; Shepherd 2018) is frequently cited by church leaders as a reason to exclude bisexual people, on the basis that if bisexual Christians are allowed into church congregations, the institution of marriage will be under threat and thereby the very moral fabric of society will be challenged. That heterosexual people are only marginally less likely to engage in consensual non-monogamy than lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender individuals (Hauptert et al., 2017) is ignored.

The sanctity of coupledness, a staple of church life, is threatened by non-traditional relationship configurations. The idolatry of the couple – what Wilkinson (2012) terms “compulsory coupledness” – which finds no clear and obvious role model in the central New Testament figures of Christ and Paul, and certainly not in the polygamous practices of the Old Testament, does further damage to those who do not fit easily into the “partner for life” paradigm.

Bisexual Christians may be further marginalised within these very relationships themselves, where a bisexual person in a different-sex relationship will be perceived to be straight, or homosexual, if in a same-sex relationship. Furthermore, some bisexual individuals will not challenge these assumptions, in order to ease their passage into a LGBT non-affirming environment, or to please an insecure partner who wishes to keep public knowledge of their mixed orientation relationship at bay (Shepherd, 2018; Toft, 2014). Both reduce visibility of bisexual people in church settings.

Equal marriage as a negative impactor on bisexual rights

One of the greatest ironies, as explored above, is the church’s fascination with binary constructs, while simultaneously espousing a triune relationship

of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This manifests itself in the preoccupation with coupledom in human relationships, the insistence on just two (hierarchically organised) relationship models (heterosexual or the less desirable homosexual variety) and gender binaries in liturgy, musical worship, and pastoral resources. This preoccupation then inadvertently leads to the concept known as bisexual erasure (Yoshino, 2000), where plurisexual identities are squeezed out of such classification systems.

Equal marriage has been viewed as a kind of nirvana for, and by, many Christian same-sex couples, desiring the blessing of their union in “God’s house”. Yet marriage equality has proved to be a double-edged sword for bisexual and transgender members of the LGBT faith community. The title of the 2012 book by openly homosexual UK priest Jeffrey John (2012), *Permanent, Faithful, Stable: Christian Same-Sex Marriage*, serves as an indicator of the platform upon which marriage equality has been achieved – at least in the United Kingdom. Equal marriage has passed the morality test by focusing on monosexual, cisgendered lesbian and gay couples and the personal and sociological stability achieved through legalising same-sex marriage.

Yet, in the attempt to acquire the social capital of their heterosexual married counterparts, are not gay and lesbian individuals engaging in the same sexual politics seen in the West from the 1970s onwards? The Gay Liberation Movement saw the large bisexual and transgender component behind the Stonewall uprising sidelined, in the interests of promoting an innate sexuality argument in favour of monosexual orientations (Shepherd, 2017). Furthermore, the title of Jeffrey John’s book suggests a desire to be accepted along the same lines as one’s heterosexual counterparts – that is, as part of a monogamous partnership for life. Yet in so doing, the church – whether intentionally or not – “others” all those who do not fit into this paradigm, unquestioningly asserting the superiority of monogamy over other family and relationship structures, however flawed the monogamous relationship may be.

My research into bisexual Christians in the United Kingdom and the United States (Shepherd 2017, 2018) uncovered a malaise among clergy and scholars towards the middle-class aspirations of many same-sex couples. One ordained participant spoke of the “June and Ward Cleaver Syndrome” in relation to several gay couples he had married, referring to the American suburban sitcom that espouses middle-class moral values (Shepherd, 2017). Others, such as academic Lisa Diamond in an interview with myself in March 2016, have alluded to the smugness of those attaining middle-class heterosexual values; in becoming part of the established hierarchy, they forget and thereby “other” those still outside the mainstream culture (Shepherd, 2018). This is Duggan’s (2002) concept of homonormativity that threatens those outside the gender and sexuality binary. Speaking of the Mormon Church, Diamond notes:

religious communities just view bisexuality as a sort of different category. Like if you're bisexual, then you should do what we think God wants you to do. We're willing to give you a pass if you're exclusively gay, but if you're bisexual, then you really should get heterosexually married. And I think that puts a lot of faithful bisexuals in a really difficult position.

(Shepherd, 2018, p. 226)

Given the paucity of discourse on bisexuality in particular in the church, as revealed by my research (Shepherd 2017, 2018, in press), it would appear that marriage equality has done little to improve visibility or acceptance of bisexual Christians within church institutions, and has arguably served to – albeit by default – further entrench the stereotype of bisexual people as serial infidels, not as deserving of acceptance in the church as their more stable monosexual gay and lesbian counterparts. This has not been helped by the global shift towards right-wing politics in the United States, much of Eastern Europe and the post-Brexit United Kingdom.

Sexual identity politics and horizontal oppression

However, bisexual Christians find themselves dismissed by their LGBT peers as well as by church leaders. Bisexual Christians are often victims of the same historical sexual identity politics as secular bisexuals, deliberately sidelined to promote the innate sexuality arguments of their monosexual peers. This can be traced back to the late 1970s and early 1980s. While bisexual people played a prominent role in the gay liberation movements of the late 1960s and early 1970s, including the Stonewall Riots of 1969, their voices were suppressed a decade later in favour of championing gay and lesbian rights. This all but forced bisexual people to form their own bisexual organisations in the early 1980s (Zimmermann, 2000). However, this bisexual mobilisation did not extend to bisexual Christians, who have remained largely closeted.

It is perhaps obvious why homosexual Christians pursue monosexist discourses, for it strengthens the argument for the acceptance of gay and lesbian Christians by the church, if same-sex attraction is promoted as being genetic and immutable (Monro, 2015; Shepherd, 2018). Bisexual people, who may experience both same-sex and different-sex attractions, are clearly flies in the ointment of such arguments. Bisexuality suggests an element of “choice”, so bisexual people must be silenced to propagate the innate sexuality argument and further the gay and lesbian cause. Reverend Neil Cazares-Thomas, British-born pastor of the LGBT-affirming Cathedral of Hope in Dallas, in critiquing horizontal oppression of bisexual congregants, describes how bisexual people are seen as the “Achilles heel” by lesbian and gay believers, “who fought to make a choice in their gender identity or sexual orientation or gender expression” (Shepherd, 2018, p. 227). Bisexual

Christians “queer the notion of what it means to be lesbian or gay, and then they become seen as a traitor” (Shepherd, 2018, p. 227).

In an article notably titled “Reinforcing Binaries, Downgrading Passions: Bisexual Invisibility in Mainstream Queer Christian Theology”, Bernhardt-House (2010, p. 55) describes queer theology as “inherently biased” against bisexual people. This bias is symptomatic of the malaise felt by queer theologians. Do they remain loyal to the social constructionist discourses of their predecessors or adopt a more essentialist view of human sexuality, which is a far better fit for the dualistic moral absolutes of the Christian faith, in terms of arguing the case for LGBT inclusion? All too often, the latter path is pursued in the name of political expediency, which is good news for monosexual lesbian and gay Christians, but not so much for the sexually fluid.

This emphasis on mononormativity (Ault, 1996) to the detriment of plurisexual individuals enables a gay-affirming case to be made for homosexuality in scripture. It can be argued that the Apostle Paul does not denounce homosexuality in his pastoral letters to the churches if we believe that homosexuality is fixed and therefore natural for that person. Rather, following this argument, Paul is referring to those who act against their inborn sexual nature, out of repression, under duress, or for various other reasons. He is not referring to those in committed same-sex relationships, but rather those who are performing acts that run contrary to their own natural sexual orientation. However, this resorting to simplistic binary categories of human sexuality – what liberation theologian Carter Heyward (1999, p. 117) terms “absolutisation” – excludes the bisexual Christian from a place at the table, and all too easily leads to horizontal oppression.

The maintenance of heterosexual power bases

This sidelining of bisexuality in queer theology in the name of sexual identity politics is reflected in church liturgies and pastoral resources, as touched on earlier by Garrigan (2009). It would perhaps be naïve to assume this is purely down to ignorance and unfamiliarity with bisexuality on the part of clergy, however. The maintenance of hierarchical power bases in the church clearly benefits those who benefit from such hegemonic systems – namely, white male, reputedly heterosexual priests. And systems require clear-cut boundaries to operate effectively. There can be no place for those who do not fit neatly into preordained boxes, as Stuart and Thatcher (1997, p. 190) note:

bisexuals undermine the whole sexual system, the neat classification of people into homosexual and heterosexual, the pathologizing of homosexuality as a heterosexual disorder and so on. Bisexuality represents desire unfettered, and perhaps that is why those who experience are so studiously unacknowledged in church documents, and on

the odd occasion where they are acknowledged, they are pathetically misrepresented as sexually indiscriminate and promiscuous.

Any mode of existence or relationship model that upsets the established order of heterosexual male supremacy must be kept at bay, with the biblical morality argument – usually based on nebulous translations of scripture – used to suppress all those who do not fit into neat monosexual, cisgender categories. This moralism is described by Heyward (1999, p. 17) as “an ideology of rightness and a posturing of certitude that absolutizes ideas and abstractions rather than actual relationships that are loving and just”. Such moralism is inflexible and cannot accept human realities, being by nature “unchanging, unbending and therefore not open to honest questioning, even by conscientious, responsible people” (Heyward, 1999, p. 19).

It is perhaps unsurprising, therefore, that bisexuality remains taboo in faith circles, when both queer theologians and church leaders would appear to be disinclined to acknowledge sexual and gender fluidity. Thus, the bisexual Christian is silenced by both the homosexual Christian seeking to make a case for their inborn sexual orientation, and the dominant heterosexual church leadership, determined to maintain the status quo to protect privileged positions. The grudging acceptance of same-sex marriage has also added to this silencing of the bisexual voice, as leading sexualities academic Lisa Diamond explained in an interview with me in March 2016:

A lot of studies have found that bisexual individuals actually have far higher rates of anxiety and depression than exclusively gay individuals and the prevailing thinking is that it's because their needs are adequately addressed by a discourse that goes, ‘Oh, you poor gay people, we’ll let you have your same sex relationships because you can’t possibly do anything else’. Bisexual individuals are not sort of served by that discourse, yet they’re not getting any more acceptance from the heterosexual side. So, they end up getting a sort of double dose of marginalisation.

(Shepherd, 2018, p. 86)

The silence on bisexuality can be explained further by the Christian church’s “erotophobia” (Goss, 2004) or traditionally sex-negative position. In an interview with me in May 2016, bisexual activist Robyn Ochs spoke of the “very profound anti-sex beliefs” and “sex negativity” she had witnessed within religious institutions (Shepherd, 2018). It has been abundantly clear from my interviews with bisexual Christians around Europe (Shepherd, *in press*), that not only is LGBT barely spoken about, but the word “sex” itself is rarely uttered. Since the word “bisexuality” contains “sex” in its root in a way that the “cuddlier” or more user-friendly terms “gay” and “lesbian” do not, both in English and other European languages, it was felt that this rendered discussion of bisexuality particularly challenging (Shepherd, 2017). In conservative church cultures specifically, where dualistic notions

of sinful, sexual bodies waging war against our spiritual nature are peddled, it is clear to see why dialogue on sexuality *per se*, let alone sexual fluidity, is considered taboo.

Bisexual Christians in Europe

My current qualitative research on the situation of bisexual Christians in Europe, though still in its infancy, is also providing data symptomatic of a cohort routinely ignored or stigmatised by the mainstream Christian church. This is the case even within those nations considered advanced in the area of LGBT rights, such as Malta, last year's most LGBT-friendly nation according to the ILGA Rainbow Map of Europe (ILGA Europe, 2019). As one male Maltese participant commented: "There's very little talk about it, about bisexuality. When it comes to gay and lesbian and even trans, now it's growing. But with bisexuality, it is totally, totally missing" (Shepherd, in press).

This silence is not restricted to Catholic countries. Another participant from largely Protestant Sweden stated that, "The Church of Sweden representatives exclude all but the homosexuals (and possibly the poor, poor trans people) and then beam proudly for being so broad-minded" (Shepherd, in press).

This silence would appear to have its roots in shame. As a 21-year-old female participant from the Netherlands noted:

We're not that topical, being bisexual and Christian ... I have a feeling that we're still being oppressed and we're being very invisible. People don't talk about that openly, because there is a lot of shame, especially around being bisexual ... because we have the status of being freaky.
(Shepherd, in press)

Her experiences were mirrored throughout the Netherlands in findings by Dutch journalist Hester Nagelhout, who recently investigated the attitudes of churches towards bisexuality in her homeland and has agreed to share her research findings. As one of Nagelhout's bisexual Christian women commented (translated from Dutch): "Most women are scared of the prejudices around it. That it's just a phase or that they want it both ways" (Naghelout, 2018).

Naghelout also interviewed members of the priesthood, with one stating, "I have only encountered it (bisexuality) once or twice in 40 years as a minister". This seems astounding, given that bisexual people comprise 52 per cent of the LGB population (GLAAD, 2016) and given the relative liberalism of Dutch society compared with many of its European neighbours – the Netherlands occupies 12th spot out of 49 European countries in the most recent ILGA Rainbow Map of Europe (ILGA Europe, 2019). However, as Dutch bisexual scholars note, the Netherlands has a long history of ignoring bisexuality as a valid sexual identity, let alone as part of a bisexual Christian intersectional identity. Van Alphen traces the invisibility of bisexuality in

the Dutch homosexual movement from 1946–72 (Van Alphen, 2017), while Maliepaard (2015) notes that subsequent discussions on sexual citizenship in the Netherlands have focused exclusively on heterosexual and homosexual people.

This silence is clearly not restricted to the Netherlands. When I put out a social media call for church youth resources in September 2019, a contact in Finland responded, “In Finland, we have a long tradition of not mentioning (LGBT) ... you will get a good idea of that by looking at this latest confirmation plan”. I entered “sexual orientation” into the attached confirmation booklet for young people of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland and got no results. Regarding sexuality, I found the generic advice below, which can neither be interpreted as affirming nor non-affirming:

A key area of growth for a young person is coming to understand their own sexuality, which tends to come to light in the everyday life of their confirmation work. Sexuality is a natural life force, created as an intrinsic part of people of all ages. A mature and healthy sexuality is to love and accept people as individuals, one’s own gender and body, and those of others.

(Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, 2017, p. 40)

In one sense, such a passage does at least offer an embodied understanding of human sexuality. Yet it remains vague on the issue of sexual orientation.

The acceptance of plurisexuality among young people indicated by the opening statistics has not spread to Eastern Europe yet. A participant from Poland commented:

Although I am a very self-confident person ... I sometimes feel quite shy about saying opening that I’m non-straight ... the people I work with are young, open-minded, etc. but still I’m afraid they would look at me not as a person, but through their prejudice.

(Shepherd, in press)

While it is not surprising that acceptance of LGBT identities is patchy in Eastern Europe, where homosexuality has been alternately outlawed by communism and now by the far right – such as Poland’s ruling Law and Justice Party – the erasure of bisexuality in the more liberal Northern and Western European countries of Europe from data collected so far suggests that my existing empirical research findings from the United Kingdom and the United States (Shepherd 2017, 2018) will be mirrored in this European study.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have explored the key reasons why bisexuality remains taboo as a topic for discussion in the mainstream Christian denominations.

A combination of hierarchical church leadership structures, horizontal oppression, ignorance of bisexuality and general erotophobia creates a toxic cocktail of denial, which serves to dismiss the bisexual experience and, with it, the wellbeing of these individuals. For vulnerable young people, this silence may have a severely detrimental effect on their mental and physical wellbeing (Shepherd, 2018).

The issues faced by bisexual Christians investigated in existing research projects (Shepherd, 2018; Toft 2012) are mirrored in my current research into bisexuality in Europe, where the silence on bisexuality is even more deafening. Even those countries traditionally deemed liberal in terms of acceptance of LGBT people, such as Belgium and Sweden, remain curiously silent on the subject of bisexuality. Malta, which tops the current ILGA league of LGBT-affirming nations in Europe (ILGA Europe, 2019), remains steadfastly silent on the topic. This is both puzzling and troubling in equal measure, not least in terms of the implications for the mental health and spirituality of young people.

However, what has become apparent both from my research and in my capacity as a bisexual Christian activist is just how few people there are with this specific intersectional identity who are willing to publicly challenge essentialist and monosexist discourses on human sexuality in the church. In my interviews with participants, both in my homeland and around Europe, I have not uncovered a single bisexual Christian support group, nor indeed a fellow activist willing to set one up. I have found just a handful of individuals willing to speak in public about being bisexual and Christian across Europe.

From my own empirical research in the United Kingdom, the United States, and Europe, it would seem imperative that further studies are undertaken on the mental health implications of ignoring bisexuality as a valid sexual orientation within the church. Closely linked to this, further research should be done on binary understandings of sex, gender, and sexuality, with a view to making recommendations on bi-inclusivity in church communities, in order to enable those with plurisexual identities to access worship and fellowship in the Christian church.

From an activist perspective, bisexual Christians themselves need to speak up and mobilise at a national level and beyond, perhaps initially forming a European support organisation online. The welfare implications of dismissing sexuality-related issues, both within secular and religious communities, must be addressed by clergy and health practitioners, if the sort of personal tragedies affecting bisexual people that we read of daily in publications such as *Pink News* – and which my own empirical research has uncovered – are to be avoided.

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5 Bifeminist anti-monogamy and the politics of erotic autonomy

Christian Klesse

Introduction: Anti-monogamy critiques in feminism

The critique of monogamy has been a pervasive feature of feminist debates on gender, power, and sexuality since the nineteenth century. Different currents within feminist theorising and activism have tackled the oppressive effects of cultures of sex, intimacy, and kinship that render monogamy a normative feature within women's lives. Rejections of monogamy were voiced from within Marxist and anarchist feminism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, in existentialist feminism in the post-World War II years, and in various strands of radical feminism, lesbian feminism, and bisexual feminism since the late 1960s, unfolding in a complex genealogy that extends to contemporary queer-feminist positions.

This work has developed different foci, ranging from critiques of capitalist gender relations and the division of labour over attempts to reshape female subjectivity to hetero-patriarchal constructions of love and the family. Some of this work has also been motivated by sexual liberationist ideas or identity political agendas (for example, as in radical feminist, lesbian feminist, or bifeminist movements). Despite important differences, I suggest that all these lineages are interconnected and held together by common threads of discourse. One of the unifying features of feminist anti-monogamy has been the common concern with women's erotic autonomy. Yet how the concept of autonomy has been filled with meaning depends profoundly on the backdrop of the respective wider social movement agendas.

While I have documented the breadth of this genealogy of feminist anti-monogamy critiques elsewhere (Klesse, 2018), I focus here specifically on *bifeminist refutations of monogamy*, concentrating primarily on work published in the United States and United Kingdom in the 1980s and 1990s, with the aim of highlighting arguments that have influenced more recent bisexual and queer feminist discussions on the topic. Through the analysis of some key texts, I show that bifeminist critiques of this period have shared some of the core assumptions prevalent within other identity-related feminist currents (such as lesbian feminism and heterosexual feminism), while endorsing a *bifeminist standpoint* and advocating a distinctly *bifeminist*

ethics of erotic autonomy at the same time. These positions have fed into more recent queer feminist discussions. Yet, as I will show at the end of this article, tensions between bisexual (feminist) and queer (feminist) forms of theorising persist. Before turning to the analysis of some selected key texts, it appears to be necessary to briefly sketch the historical debates on autonomy.¹

Feminist debates on autonomy

The value of the concept of autonomy as a mobilising tool for empowerment has been contested across different strands of feminist philosophy. Some feminists have rejected the idea of autonomy as being implicitly androcentric, operating within a reductionist liberal framework that focuses on the individual, who is conceived as a self-governing subject bare of care relations and dependencies.

Distinct critiques of autonomy have been guided by a wide range of theoretical perspectives, including psychoanalysis (namely object relations approaches to gender identity), Lacanian critiques of coherent subjectivity, Foucault-inspired attacks on the rational Enlightenment actor, refutations of liberal contract theory from within critical theory, Marxist and materialist critiques of care work, and intersectionality theories derived from within Black feminism.

I concur with Mackenzie and Stoljar (1999, p. 3) that while these feminist critiques of autonomy have identified serious theoretical and political problems with some historical and contemporary conceptions of autonomy, the notion of autonomy is vital to feminist attempts to understand oppression, subjection, and agency.

In recent years, we have witnessed a critical reappraisal of the concept of autonomy in feminist philosophy. Many feminist scholars are adamant that some notion of autonomy needs to be retained in order to theoretically conceive of agency, personal change, or collective social struggle (Friedman, 2003; McNay, 2000). They refute the charge that the notion of autonomy is necessarily individualistic and foreground the “relational” dimensions within certain conceptualisations of autonomy that highlight the interconnection between subjects and their networks and social environments, and their embeddedness in structures of constraint (Friedman, 2014; Mackenzie, 2014; Veltman & Piper, 2014). Many contributors to these debates do not engage with questions of sexuality. Although feminist discussions of non-monogamy rarely take account of these more abstract debates in feminist philosophy, I hold the view that it is helpful to read these literatures alongside each other because they share common concerns.

Bisexual feminism and the critique of monogamy

Feminist activists, including bisexual feminists, have converged in the belief that the common conflation between bisexuality and non-monogamy (as a

bisexual default condition) poses a problem for bisexual politics (Monro, 2015). That notwithstanding, research indicates that the relationship values, cultural identifications, and positions within bisexual communities with regard to sexual politics are highly diverse (Queen, 1995). For different reasons, many bisexual-identified people feel drawn to and consciously opt for non-monogamous or polyamorous ways of life (Klesse, 2005; Robinson, 2013; Rodriguez Rust, 2000). Moreover, research suggests that for many bisexual women, their non-monogamy is infused with a commitment to feminism, gender equality, or female empowerment, or their opposition to hetero-patriarchal gender regimes (Deri, 2015; Ritchie & Barker, 2007).

In this chapter, I look in closer detail at how bisexual feminists have discussed bisexual nonmonogamy and polyamory as articulations of erotic autonomy and strategies of resistance. I critically analyse key publications from the 1980s onwards that criticise monogamy from a bisexual perspective.

It is important to remember that the rejection of monogamy was a quite common feature in 1970s and 1980s militant feminism, spanning different ideological currents from radical to Marxist feminism, with distinctive articulations among women who were seen as minorities (Jackson & Scott, 2003). Feminist attacks on compulsive monogamy rejected hetero-patriarchal marriage as a socio-legal institution that subordinated and disenfranchised women, sustaining an emotional culture of exploitative gender relations (Willey, 2016; see also Comer, 1974). Ideas of sexual liberationism were another major ideological influence that pervaded many counter-cultural milieux, including certain feminist activist circles (Campbell, 1974). Bisexual feminist thought has been built upon these legacies, and both ideological currents can be identified in bi feminist work of the 1980s and 1990s.

Hemmings (2002) argues that bisexual perspectives tend to emerge at the conjunctures of dominant frameworks of sexual classification. Bisexual feminism has formed a kind of third space – in the sense given to the term by Bhabha (1990) – which allows for hybrid rearticulations of experiences and conceptual frameworks. Hemmings pays particular attention to the dialogue between bisexual feminism and lesbian feminism, arguing that bisexual feminism has been shaped in constant friction and interaction with lesbian feminism. This was particularly so during the period of feminist politics in which lesbian feminism assumed a strong, if not a hegemonic, position within radical feminism.

A further reason for the prominence of a lesbian feminism as a point of reference for bisexual feminists in this period was that at least in some countries, particularly the United States, many bisexual feminist leaders had previous experience of organising within lesbian feminist politics (Udis-Kessler, 1996). Moreover, the very term “bisexual feminism” had been contentious from the point of view of a lesbian feminist position that endorsed political strategies of separatism, at the level of both political organisation and personal relationships. The edited volume *Closer to Home. Bisexuality and Feminism* (Weise, 1992) elaborates how bisexual feminism was caught up

between the forces of “heterosexual sexism and the ideological purity of the lesbian community”. From the late 1960s to the 1990s, many lesbian feminists engaged in a hostile discourse against bisexual feminism, partly as a result of widely held popular anti-bisexual sentiments, and partially in response to the specific challenges posed by bisexual feminism to the central tenets of lesbian feminist ideology and the destabilising effects it had with regard to lesbian identity narratives and rationalities of community formation (e.g. Jeffreys, 1999; see Ault, 1994 for a critical analysis).

George (1993, p. 46) remembers:

For some years in the 1970s and 1980s it was very difficult for an active feminist to be open about her bisexuality. For many feminists, bisexuality was seen simply as the cowardly holding to heterosexual privilege.

While in the United Kingdom anti-bisexual sentiment in lesbian communities was mostly rather subtle, lesbian feminists in the United States contested bisexuality in heated public arguments. For all these reasons, bisexual feminists were engaged in a close engagement with debates in lesbian feminism. In the following section, I argue that bisexual discourses on non-monogamy developed through a careful reworking of lesbian feminist ideas on anti-monogamy.

Political lesbianism, women’s communities, and the “dyke-ethics of anti-monogamy”

Against the common stereotype of lesbian feminism being bound up with a corporeal culture of prudery, lesbian feminists were probably the most vocal critics of monogamy, which often was dismissed as a remnant of “compulsive heterosexuality” (Wandrei, 2019). For many lesbian feminists, monogamy, marriage, and the subordination of women are seen as inherently linked (Stelboum, 1999).

In a contribution to a volume of UK feminist activist writing, Becky Rosa (1994) suggests that non-monogamy can be conducive to lesbian feminist autonomy by responding in flexible and non-assimilationist ways to women’s relationship needs and by supporting the collective strength of women through the creation of friendship-based women’s communities. Angela Willey (2016) sees Rosa’s argument as a formulation of a transformative “dyke ethics of anti-monogamy”.

The emphasis on a feminist ethics of friendship is closely linked to the broadening of the category “lesbian” through a fusion of feminism with lesbianism and the refashioning of lesbian identity away from *sexual orientation* to a primarily *political identity* (around women-centred life choices and political strategies) since the 1970s. Rich (1983) bemoans the social pressures and sanctions that force women into heterosexual relationships.

She aims to counteract the culture of heterosexism through the promotion of a “woman-identified” culture of relationality, suggesting that all women could place themselves on a lesbian continuum if they decided to forsake relationships with men in favour of close, intimate bonds with women. Although Rich does not explicitly endorse non-monogamy, monogamy itself is cast as an integral element of heteropatriarchal culture to isolate women from each other and to subject them to the control of individual men (husbands) (Stelboum, 1999).

Rosa’s (1994) influential article “Anti-monogamy: A Radical Challenge to Compulsory Heterosexuality” elaborates these common views within political lesbianism and cultural feminism into a distinctively political anti-monogamy stance. This article is considered to be emblematic of the approach to non-monogamy within lesbian feminism in this period by Willey (2016). It is noteworthy that in this text monogamy is not simply seen as a way of regulating individual women’s sexuality; rather, it defines a more comprehensive couple-focused social imaginary (Rosa, 1994). Rosa (1994, p. 109) argues that, “For monogamy to exist, there needs to be a division between sexual/romantic love and nonsexual love”. This distinction implies the denigration and underrating of friendship bonds. In particular, this aspect reveals the pervasive and far-reaching powers of monogamy as a regulative ideal. It is because of the wider value system articulated within compulsive monogamy that, “Women’s monogamy has repercussions for their friends, for nonmonogamous women, and for feminism” (Rosa 1994, p. 108).

An enhanced scope for autonomy is a core value in Rosa’s appreciation of friendship: “Friendship is more compatible with autonomy, independence and freedom, and perhaps has a more voluntary nature than the obligation of love relationships” (Rosa 1994, p. 112). Rosa states clearly that her concern is not so much sexual liberation, but the creation of a feeling of community among women. By distinguishing her project of anti-monogamy from casual sex by linking it to long-term commitments, Rosa engages in a discourse that strongly resonates with contemporary debates on polyamory.

It should be noted that more liberationist discourses on lesbian women’s sexuality also circulated in lesbian communities in this period (Wandrei, 2019). In the United States, sex-positive positions can be identified, for example, in the writings of Rubin (1992) or Duggan (1995). The sex-positive discourse on lesbian sexuality gained a stronger profile in the course of the so-called sex wars (Walters, 2016). It can be seen as a precursor of queer theory. After having mapped core arguments in lesbian feminist debates on non-monogamy in the 1980s and 1990s, I proceed to show how bisexual feminist positions of the time mirror and differ from these positions. With all their differences, they share an investment in what could be called a *bifeminist ethics of non-monogamy*, cast as a concern with women’s erotic autonomy.

Bi feminism/lesbian feminism: Solidarity and tension

Many bisexual feminists refer very positively to Rich's critique of heteropatriarchy and her political project of creating woman-identified networks and culture, even if they struggle with the concept of the "lesbian continuum" due to its implicit erasure of bisexual identification (Bennett, 1992; Kaplan, 1992).

Bennett (1992, p. 222) challenges Rich's "assertion that all women who desire connection with other women are truly lesbian", which she reads as a quasi-essentialist statement. Asserting that, "For many bisexual women, woman-identification is a crucial part of our experience" (Bennett, 1992, p. 222), she inscribes bisexuality into women-centred visions of sociality.

In the same edited volume, Kaplan (1992) engages in a close reading of Rich's (1983) canonical article "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence." Like Rich, she condemns the "unexamined heterocentricity" that structures many women's lives (Kaplan, 1992, p. 270) and she questions the privilege that women may derive from having intimate relationships with heterosexual men. At the same time, she is wary of Rich's implicit determinism, the expansive definition of lesbianism, and Rich's refusal to directly address the question of bisexuality in a meaningful engagement. She questions the generalised categorisation of woman-oriented acts as resistance. Finally, she offers a reading of Rich's ideas of resistance to compulsory heterosexuality that highlights reflexive struggle rather than withdrawal. Rich's major argument, she states, has been with the lack of choice women have with regard to their gendered partnering options and not with the fact that some women live heterosexual lives:

The quest is not necessarily for women to abandon relationships with men, but rather, to be free from requirements to be with men and to be self-conscious of our motivations when we are with men.

(Kaplan, 1992, p. 275)

This argument entails a quest of women's autonomy, with regard to both heteronormative and lesbian community-focused normative expectations. It is based on a principled stance against patriarchy and endorsement of woman-centred life choices:

Both acts that are pro-woman and acts that assert women's independence from men can be ways to resist a heteropatriarchal imperative which posits as the focus of women's existence.

(Kaplan, 1992, p. 272)

This sentiment was widely shared among bisexual feminists in the United States in this period (see also Baker, 1992; Elliott, 1992; Udis-Kessler, 1992).

In an article published in the United Kingdom, Gregory (1983, p. 140) speaks about the desire “to put forward a notion of woman-centred sexuality which would unite lesbian, heterosexual and bisexual women, and which would include celibate women”. This position, too, mirrors the emphasis on friendship and community among women proposed by lesbian feminist activists. Yet while lesbian feminists believed that the label “lesbian” or the notion of the “lesbian continuum” could serve as a suitable umbrella term to signify this community spirit, bisexual feminists like Gregory continue to name differences in term of identity and construe unity as the result of proactive alliance-building. Arguments about mutual solidarity and coalition work that acknowledge both unity and difference were common in 1990s bisexual feminism (George, 1993).

While there are overlaps of lesbian and bi feminist discussions of non-monogamy, bifeminist positions at times differ quite profoundly from lesbian feminist criticism. This is because many advocates of political lesbianism were adamant that true feminists should stop having sexual relationships with men.

Whereas some bisexual feminists argued that non-monogamy with partners of different genders could render bisexual women’s identities visible and tangible (Gregory, 1983; Murray, 1995), and therefore would be a valid strategy in the larger project of bisexual women’s feminist empowerment, at least some currents within lesbian feminism pronounced that romantic or sexual contacts with men would inevitably erase a woman’s legitimacy to access the very category “feminist”.

In the United Kingdom, the Leeds Revolutionary Feminist Group (1981, p. 8) proclaimed, “Giving up fucking for a feminist is about taking your politics seriously”. Intimate and/or sexual relationships with men were frowned upon, since they directed energy and care to the class of oppressors. Women were expected to prove their commitment to women’s resistance and women-identified culture by entering relationships with women or being celibate. Both heterosexuality and bisexuality appeared to be politically suspect from within this position. Often bisexual women were specifically singled out for attacks (Jeffreys, 1999). Similar discourses prevailed in the United States (George, 1993; Udis-Kessler, 1992).

It is not surprising, then, that although many bisexual and heterosexual feminists shared the critique of marriage, institutionalised heterosexuality, and compulsory monogamy with lesbian feminists, they defined erotic autonomy in ways that explicitly defended *in political terms* non-monogamous relationship choices that may include men (at least as an hypothetical option) (Gregory, 1983; Murray, 1995; Robinson, 1997). The claim to a right to engage in romantic or sexual relations with people of different genders is key to bifeminist treatments of the non-monogamy question in this period.

Individual choice, bisexual freedom, bisexual autonomy

For bisexual feminists, the envisioned unification of and mutual solidarity among different groups of women and different factions of feminism can only be possible if women's choices to have sexual and/or intimate partners were considered as being *in principle* legitimate. Many bi feminist critiques of non-monogamy therefore tend to highlight the individual woman's right to love whomever she decides to love (Elliott, 1992). Kaplan (1992, p. 269), for example, argues:

One of the underlying principles in a bisexual-feminist ideology is that of sexual choice. The primary focus is on the right to choose male and female lovers,² but the concept of sexual choice can be expanded to include other issues, such as the right to choose nonmonogamy, to choose lovers of traditionally 'inappropriate' socio-cultural groups and to choose *not* to have sex.

Autonomy is here articulated in the terms of rights and presented as a matter of choice, in a codification that strongly resonates with Plummer's (1995, p. 151) notion of intimate citizenship, which contains "*socially grounded choices (or not) about identities, gender experiences, erotic experiences*" as a core element of its definition (emphasis in original).

Gregory (1983), too, puts an emphasis on bi women's *individual autonomy*, but with a slightly different slant, suggesting that bisexual integrity can only be sustained by a form of autonomy that commands emotional containment (or emotional celibacy). Whatever a bisexual woman's relationship status may be, she argues, there is an element within bi eroticism that prevents bisexual women from completely identifying with their lovers. "When we consciously embrace our sexuality, we affirm that our full individual sexuality can only exist in so far as we locate it within ourselves" (Gregory, 1983, p. 151). This is why Gregory (1983, p. 150) suggests that bisexuality has an "in-built potential for personal autonomy". Put differently, "Bisexuality implies a fundamental separation of ourselves from all our relationships. It implies that our sense of sexual definition and personal fulfilment can never come through any one sexual relationship" (Gregory, 1983, p. 153).

Gregory detaches her argument for self-ownership from the question of relationship status (and thus the *practice* of non-monogamy) by framing her concern with erotic autonomy as a question of selfhood and bisexual authenticity bound up with the personal *capacity for nonmonogamy*.

Systemic critique and bi standpoint logic

Murray (1995, p. 293) presents a principled political critique of compulsory monogamy from "an explicitly bifeminist standpoint". The text doesn't just highlight the empowering and transgressive potential of women's

non-monogamous relationship choices, it also articulates an appeal to the bisexual community – and to bifeminists in particular – to defend nonmonogamy as a valid way of life and to collectively struggle against compulsive monogamy.

Murray's (1995) discussion contains many threads that are common across different currents of feminist monogamy critique from the 1970 into the 1990s – for example, the rejection of the gendered double standard, slut shaming, and the emotional and physical control of women in heteropatriarchal marriage. Non-monogamy is often associated with the word “promiscuity” in ways that reveal a fear of pro-sex attitudes and sexual motives. This amounts to a call for solidarity based on a vision of an erotically diverse bisexual community, similar to Queen's (1995) plea, published in the same volume of bisexual writing as Murray's (1995) chapter.

Let me illustrate these features in somewhat more detail. Murray's (1995) chapter opens with a rigid refutation of compulsory monogamy. The second paragraph reads, “A bisexual politic rooted in feminism must examine issues such as monogamy head-on, rather than dance defensively around controversial questions”. (Murray, 1995, p. 293). She complains that “many monogamous bisexual feminists try to downplay the presence of nonmonogamy in bi women's communities” (Murray, 1995, p. 302).

The autonomy of choice: Between structuralism, contract law, and market logic

Murray (1995) clearly addresses monogamy as a structural or an “institutionalised” social formation. Its institutional character is revealed on several levels: On the most basic level, monogamy is *naturalised*, i.e. represented as a cultural norm as if it was “the ‘natural’ way we form relationships” (1995, p. 295). Monogamy is further kept in place through a contractual logic. While Murray discusses the marriage contract (both as an interpersonal arrangement and a wider social imaginary), she also refers to other models of contract. It is interesting that Murray also evokes labour law to discuss the particularities and oddities of monogamous arrangements:

Monogamy is one of the few contracts in which relations with other parties are relevant to the partnership. If your company doesn't want you working for anybody else, it must state this exclusivity specifically in your contract. Otherwise, you can assume it is acceptable to take jobs with other employers too (though not on company time, of course). I find it strange that in sexual relationships, the exclusive arrangement is the marked case.

(Murray, 1995, p. 295)

The casual – and, I would argue, non-reflexive – way in which labour market rationalities are introduced to highlight discourses and emotional schemes

around non-monogamy reveals the strong extent to which Murray's discussion remains steeped in a liberal capitalist and market individualism. Labour and business law, and conceptual reasoning, provide the templates through which relationship dynamics are read and interpreted. The employment contract is here represented as an agreement between individuals framed as rational subjects, delineating their mutual commitments bare of concerns with power differentials and structural constraints.

Murray's critique of monogamous marriage is articulated within a more structural critique of contract thinking. She sees marriage as a system of control and privilege that operates through a model of property rights (based on exclusive ownership of access to women's bodies, labour, and offspring). Murray (1995) further highlights the protections for women that come along with marriage arrangements and that many perceive as a benefit. Non-monogamous women threaten these cultural customs and dealings. Very much in the spirit of Goldman's (1897) and de Beauvoir's (1949/1976) critique of marriage, Murray sees such protective solutions as destructive of women's spirit of independence. This dynamic reveals the contradiction between women's autonomy and monogamy: "After all, monogamy contradicts the feminist goal of women's control of their own bodies and decisions about their own agency" (Murray, 1995, p. 297).

The contract of monogamy further shores up identities, gendered subject positions, social conventions, notions of property, and the status quo by the creation of "safe" categories of people. In contradistinction, "Nonmonogamous bisexuality forces people to make active, conscious decisions about when and whether to become sexual with someone" (Murray, 1995, p. 298). This calls into question taken-for-granted boundaries of "relationships", "friendships", and the gendered codes in which they are presented. This *bifeminist ethics of anti-monogamy* thus enhances (self-) reflexivity and increases personal autonomy.

Furthermore, according to Murray (1995), non-monogamous bifeminism helps to create critical gender knowledge on an experiential level. Erotic engagement with people of different genders allows unique and potentially transgressive insights into the gender order. While Murray's definition of bisexuality largely follows a binary logic, her arguments about experimental exploration emphasise boundary blurring in a more queer fashion.

Queer (bi)feminist theory: Queering gender – queering sexuality

(Bi)feminist critiques of monogamy that follow the epistemological or queer-theoretical turn in bisexual theory (Alexander & Anderlini-Onofrio, 2012) are critical of all kinds of essentialism and argue that bisexual nonmonogamy carries a *deconstructive* potential with regard to normative ideas concerning intimacy, gender, and sexual identity (Baker, 1992).

For example, Gustavson (2012) argues that a queer bisexual perspective allows movement from a model of sexual orientation that relates to gender

in terms of object choice to an understanding that looks at relationship practice in a more dynamic fashion. If we pay attention to the fluidity at the heart of ordinary stories of eroticism in everyday life, it is possible to avoid the gender binary at the heart of dominant sexual ontologies. Bisexuality provides a promising vantage point from which to critically undo such traps in representing human desire or the body because it does not hinge upon the question of sexual object choice. “Bisexuality differs from (modern) notions on homosexuality and heterosexuality, because these are defined by the expected gender of the partner” (Gustavson, 2012, p. 216). This is the case because

bisexuality avoids this definition because it indicates that the object of desire may shift, and gender as an object choice is therefore not central to sexual identity. It would be pointless to try to decide the gender of the partner by knowing that a person is bisexual.

(Gustavson, 2012, pp. 215–16)

Bisexuality thus creates gender trouble, because within bisexual scenarios of attraction and desire, object choices cannot be matched onto each other as Butler’s analysis of the heterosexual matrix would imply (see Hemmings, 2002; see also Callis, 2009).

Many bisexual feminists suggest that bisexual non-monogamy tends to subvert gender and sexual orientation binaries due to its inherent complexity and fluidity (Barker, 2005; Gurevich, Bailey, & Bower, 2009). This literature resonates with a view of “bisexuality beyond gender”, or at least bisexuality beyond gender duality, which has been widely embraced in queer-infused bisexual theory (Eisner, 2013) and has gained stronger ground within bisexual politics over recent years (Bowes-Catton, 2007).

The relationship between bisexual theory and queer theory or post-structuralist feminism is a complicated and ambivalent one. Many bisexual activists and theorists initially endorsed queer theory as a beacon of hope for bisexual inclusion (Burrill, 2002), but were quickly disappointed by the lack of consideration paid to bisexuality by key theorists, such as Eve Kosovsky Sedgwick, Diane Fuss, and Judith Butler (Young, 1997). Many believe that a bisexual perspective would be compatible with and conducive of a radically inclusive politics with a queer deconstructive agenda (Callis, 2009; Hemmings, 2002). “Inasmuch as bisexuality poses a threat to the institutions of heterosexuality and homosexuality, it also opens up a set of truly queer possibilities”, argue Erickson-Schroth and Mitchell (2009, p. 313). Similarly, Callis (2009, p. 230) hopes that, “The melding of the two [*queer and bisexual theories*] will allow queer theory to strengthen its position of deconstruction, while forcing bisexuality to remain openly identified and inclusive”. Others, while being overtly sympathetic to queer theoretical and poststructuralist feminist approaches, have also stressed the risk of subjecting an already precarious category such as bisexuality to deconstruction (Monro, 2015).

Many of the arguments discussed here mirror concerns raised in the long-standing debates between feminism and queer theory at large (Richardson, McLaughlin, & Casey, 2006). Yet bisexual feminists feel that the common devaluation of bisexual identities exacerbated the risks of depoliticisation, delegitimation, and invisibility long before bisexuality ever has been granted any recognition whatsoever. Queer feminist bisexual critiques of monogamy have therefore mostly continued to highlight bisexual specificity. *Bifeminist anti-monogamy* – even within a deconstructive framework – thus contains a politics of erotic autonomy that is committed to a distinctive subjectivity, whether articulated as a sense of self, an endorsement of capacity, a communal imaginary, or a socio-political project.

Conclusion: Queer feminist nonmonogamy – queering women’s bonds through autonomy

In this chapter, I have shown that bisexual feminist critiques of monogamy since the 1980s and 1990s have tended to endorse the value of women’s erotic autonomy and agency through a focus on women as desiring subjects. The concrete terms of the definition of autonomy depend on historical context, political constellation, and the wider theoretical frameworks deployed in the social movement currents within which they were developed. Distinctive perspectives of autonomy have been guided by the critique of marriage and patriarchy, to endorsements of women’s communities, the proclamation of personal freedom and choice, the discourse of identity and authenticity, the rejection of privileges bound up with fulfilling the normative expectations to be monogamous, and the transgression of gender norms, sexualities, and relational categories. Originally strongly tied to bisexual standpoint rationalities, concerns with identity recede into the background as time progresses. As the discussion moves from the 1980s into the 1990s and into the new millennium, queer feminist arguments about deconstruction, binary critique, and gender trouble become more vocal. Yet most bisexual feminists continue to insist on highlighting bisexual difference and specificity in order to avoid queer theory becoming yet another driver for bi erasure, a dynamic so well described by Yoshino (2000).

Notes

- 1 In this article, I use the terms “bifeminism” or “bisexual feminism” interchangeably. Both terms are used in the literature. I reserve these terms for work that has been published under this label or that deals with gender inequalities in contexts clearly defined as bisexual. I highlight ambiguities around positioning wherever this is appropriate. For this article, I worked with more than 30 texts in English language from different countries (notably the United States and the United Kingdom) that explore bisexuality and non-monogamy from women’s or gender-critical perspectives, presenting or developing arguments that resonate with the

discursive repertoires of feminism. Due to restrictions in terms of word length, not all these works can be cited in this article. I decided to focus on work that has been influential for activist debates (such as articles published in popular anthologies) or that is more theoretical in nature (compared with work that reports research findings). As always, the boundaries between different genres of texts are fuzzy and cannot always be drawn easily.

- 2 Nowadays, most bisexual feminists would use a different language to define bisexuality that is more attentive to the problems of gender-dualistic constructions. See Bowes-Catton (2007) and Eisner (2013) for a discussion of contemporary meanings of bisexuality within queer and trans* epistemologies.

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Part II

Romantic relationships



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6 The becoming of family relationships and friendship circles after a bisexual breakup

Annukka Lahti

Introduction

Romantic relationships do not exist in isolation: they are formed, lived, and dissolved in social contexts. Relationships that are connected to people's wider social networks and supported by family and friends are more likely to thrive than relationships that exist separately from them (Sprecher et al., 2002). Research also reveals the effects of the couple norm on social networks and friendship circles (Ketokivi, 2012). Social life is often organised around couple relationships, and participation in a friendship circle may be based on the unspoken rule that one must be part of a couple (Aeby & van Hooff, 2019). This often becomes visible when a separation occurs. In Aeby and van Hooff's (2019) study, people who had recently become single had a difficult time, as they often noticed they were excluded from social events to which they had previously been invited as part of a couple.

This chapter begins with the observation that for some of the bisexual women I interviewed (Lahti, 2019), it was difficult to sustain friendships through relationship breakups. As research on social networks and relationships has concentrated mainly on heterosexual relationships and breakups (e.g. Castrén, 2009; Sprecher, Felmlee, Schmeekle, & Shu, 2006), I explore how bisexual women's family relationships and friendship circles unravel after a relationship breakup. In doing so, I intervene at the conjunction of three under-researched areas: bisexual people's relationships, LGBTIQ+ separations, and social networks after relationship breakups.

Hitherto, only a small number of studies have focused on LGBTIQ+ separations (e.g. Balsam, Rostosky & Riggle, 2017; Gahan, 2018). It has been argued, however, that the long battle for equal rights has placed LGBTIQ+ people's couple relationships under heavy pressure to succeed and appear as ordinary and happy as possible (Gahan, 2018; Lahti, 2015). Consequently, partners in LGBTIQ+ relationships might remain silent regarding the problems and breakups they face in their relationships. They might therefore not get the support they need from their communities, friends, and relatives. Since it is only recently that some studies have concentrated on bisexual people's relationships (e.g. Baumgartner, 2017; DeCapua, 2017;

Gustavson, 2009; Hayfield, Campbell, & Reed, 2018; Lahti, 2019), there is no research on the specific effects of separations on bisexual people's family relationships or friendship circles. This chapter aims to fill this research gap.

Previous research on bisexual people's relationships has produced important insights regarding how binegative cultural constructions – which invalidate and stigmatise bisexuality as a wavering, promiscuous sexuality, and bisexual people as unable to commit to long-term relationships – might contribute to uncertainty and mistrust in bisexual people's relationships (e.g. DeCapua, 2017; Gustavson, 2009; Hayfield et al., 2018; Klesse, 2011). This can happen regardless of whether bisexual people wish to engage in monogamous or non-monogamous relationships (Baumgartner, 2017; Gustavson, 2009; Klesse, 2011). Other studies have focused on how bisexual identities can be made visible in the context of relationships (e.g. Hartman-Linck, 2014). Baumgartner's (2017) study of (internalised) binegativity and my own study (Lahti, 2019) of bisexual women's relationships highlight the subtle ways in which oppressive cultural discourses (or the absence of discourse) work and cause pain, including from within bisexual subjects themselves. In my study, the precariousness of bisexual identity – since a strong frame of intelligibility is not always available for differently gendered desires – required affective work, not only on the part of bisexual women, but also by their partners (Lahti, 2019). Yet to fully understand how the affective, messy realities of bisexual people's lives unfold after their breakups, it is not enough to focus on how bisexual people experience their identities, or even on how they negotiate those identities in relationships with others.

This chapter offers a new perspective on the becoming of bisexual bodies through breakup assemblages. Drawing on a Deleuzo-Guattarian framework, I conceptualise family relationships and friendship circles after relationship breakups as processual assemblages where multiple and complex elements come together. My starting point is an understanding of bisexuality as a process of “becoming” as part of these relational assemblages, rather than as “being” a stable identity. In these becomings, relationship norms and hierarchies, and (bi)sexuality and gender norms, entangle with events, scenes, and affective intensities, which come together as a flow, connecting in various ways and various forms. This approach makes it possible to explore what kinds of relational assemblage enhance bisexual bodies' vitality and capability to connect with other bodies – and what kinds of assemblage diminish their vitality or force them to deteriorate.

From binegativity to the becoming of bisexual bodies

In this study, “bisexuality” refers to the experience of emotional, romantic, and/or sexual attraction to people of more than one gender. It is often thought that because bisexual people can “choose” partners of different genders, they have uncomplicated access to heterosexual privilege. However, many

bisexuals encounter prejudice and discrimination in both heterosexual and LGBTIQ+ communities, which can be an isolating experience (Hayfield, Clarke, & Halliwell, 2014, Kangasvuo, 2014). In bisexuality research, the concept of sociocultural binegativity is widely used to explain the social marginalisation of bisexuality and bisexual identities in various areas of bisexual people's lives, including relationships (DeCapua, 2017; Hayfield et al., 2014, 2018; Klesse, 2011). However, the theorisation of bisexualities cannot end with the concept of binegativity. When binegativity is utilised as an analytical tool, it risks creating the notion that there is an essentialised core of bisexuality and bisexual identity that suffers binegative oppression. This notion has a tendency to universalise bisexual experience, and perhaps produces too simple an idea of how bisexual experiences come about.

In this chapter, I distance myself from the idea that bisexual identity is something that "belongs" to an individual (e.g. Fox & Alldred, 2013; Kolehmainen & Juvonen, 2018) and suggest that how bisexuality matters – for example, when a breakup occurs – depends not on an inner truth or identity, but on the assemblages it forms with other bodies (Malins, 2004). From this perspective, becoming bisexual can be seen as a transsubjective and intercorporeal process, rather than as the achievement of a fixed identity (Kolehmainen & Juvonen, 2018). This approach derives from new materialist approaches in (bi)sexuality research (Fox & Alldred, 2013; Fraser, 1999; Kolehmainen, 2018; Lahti, 2018, 2020). New materialist relational ontologies challenge prevailing conceptualisations of gender and sexuality (Kolehmainen, 2018, 2019; Kolehmainen & Juvonen, 2018). In this framework, bisexuality (like other sexualities) is not conceived of solely in identitarian terms, as residing within an individual; nor can it be reduced to social structures, discourses, or conventions (Fox & Alldred, 2013; Fraser, 1999; Kolehmainen, 2018; Lahti, 2018).

Inspired by researchers (e.g. Fox & Alldred, 2013; Fraser, 1999; Kolehmainen, 2018, 2019) who have mobilised Deleuze and Guattari's (2004) approach, I conceptualise bisexualities as emerging through affective assemblages where multiple and complex elements come together as flows that might go in various directions (see also Kolehmainen, 2018; Lahti, 2018). Instead of analysing only one element or dimension that determines the other elements – for example, thinking that relationship breakups are determined by (bi)sexual identities – I understand the affective effects of relationship assemblages in terms of how each unique assemblage increases the bodies' affective capabilities to connect with other bodies – in other words, the vitality of the bodies involved.

In relational affect studies, affects – understood as intensities, energies, and flows – are conceptualised as emerging out of dynamic encounters between bodies and things (Gregg & Seigworth, 2010; Kolehmainen & Juvonen, 2018; Seyfert, 2012). Affect can entail emotions, but it is not synonymous with individual human emotions as understood, for example, in the sociological theorisation of emotions (Kolehmainen & Juvonen, 2018). Affect is

an effect of somebody or something on another, and is often not consciously experienced. Affective transmission and interaction are determined by the affective capabilities of all the elements and bodies involved in an assemblage. In this sense, “affects do not ‘belong’ to anybody” and cannot be ascribed only to human bodies (Seyfert, 2012, p. 27), but involve encounters with all kinds of bodies: human, non-human, artificial, and imaginary. The affects of an assemblage are rhizomatic: They connect bodies up with other bodies, affects, and social relationships, in many different directions (Malins, 2004).

My question is thus not what (bisexual) bodies are or how to define them, but rather what bodies can do – or what they can be made to do as part of an assemblage (Fraser, 1999; Kolehmainen, 2018). Exploring different relationships of bodies, things, and affects in bisexual women’s breakup assemblages might shed new light on bisexualities and bisexual identities, which are often thought of as temporary, vague, or wavering (Lahti, 2019). What kind of family relationship or friendship circle assemblages allow bisexual bodies to intensify or to live – or force them to deteriorate? Since all assemblages are unique, the analysis in this chapter cannot, of course, be generalised to all bisexuals, or to all bodies in bisexual assemblages. Nevertheless, it provides an example of how bisexuality can be conceptualised as a body’s capacity to act: how family relationship and friendship circle assemblages enable or block the affective capabilities of the (bisexual) bodies involved.

Data and methodology

In this chapter, I draw on two sets of interview data. The first set comprises eight interviews with LGBTIQ+ people who had experienced a recent relationship breakup. I concentrate on the three interviewees who had relationship histories with partners of various genders. In these three separation interviews, the participants were aged between 27 and 41. All of them said their official gender was female, but one of them said they did not see their gender as “100 per cent female.” The second data set is a longitudinal set of interviews: five (originally seven) couple interviews with bisexual women and their variously gendered partners (four women and three men, one of whom identified as a trans man) conducted in 2005, and 11 follow-ups conducted some ten years later in 2014–15. These participants were aged between 22 and 42 at the time of the first interview, and between 32 and 52 at the follow-up interview. By the time of the follow-up interviews, the majority of the couples interviewed in 2005 had separated, and most of the interviewees had new partners. Both sets of interviews were conducted in Finnish cities and towns. The original couple interviews were semi-structured; the couple follow-ups and the separation interviews were biographical narrative interviews. All the interviews lasted between one and

four hours and were audio-recorded and transcribed. I conducted the analysis in Finnish, then translated the extracts for publication. All names used are pseudonyms.

In the analysis, I pay attention to the changes of patterned relationships, the flows and interruptions of affective intensities, in family relationship and friendship circle assemblages. Lines of energy are continually becoming through complex groupings of assemblages, which are always temporary and always more than the sum of their elements (Ringrose & Renold, 2014). Yet it is possible to detect some segmenting and violating forces within these becomings. In Deleuzo-Guattarian terms, the lines of energy can be congealing, solidifying, territorialising forces. But there is therefore also a possibility that energy will break off from normative lines, and the energy thereby released will enable becomings in unpredictable, deterritorialising ways (Huuki, 2016; Ringrose & Renold, 2014). By following the affective intensities and territorialising and deterritorialising energies in bisexual women's family relationship and friendship circle assemblages, I wish to shed light on the constructions of – and challenges to – power that lie hidden in the affective flow of events, scenes, and experiences that come together in breakup assemblages.

Mixed relationships Partner's gender steering affective intensities in family relationship assemblages

While I was exploring bisexual women's assembled family relationship and friendship circles after their breakups, it caught my attention that the gender of their partner mattered in how affective intensities were assembled in their family relationship assemblages. According to Sara Ahmed's theorisation, happiness functions as a promise that steers us towards certain objects in the world. Especially within bisexual women's family relationships, heterosexual couple relationships functioned as a "happy object" (Ahmed, 2010), which had the power to steer affective intensities towards some bodies and away from others, sometimes in very unhappy ways.

Emma, who had a relationship history with both men and women, described how her parents reacted to her breakup with her first female partner: "My parents were so happy about that breakup, which was really quite grim, when I was so broken over it." When they had first found out about her female partner, they had told Emma they were going to kill themselves. Her parents' violent rejection of her non-heterosexual relationship and their threats of suicide affected the becoming and vitality of her body long after the breakup:

It was quite a ragged course ...¹ how I continued my life after that. It was such a roller coaster for many years, many different kinds of relationships, and I was really out of sorts with my identity.

Later on, the vitality of her body increased again. Moving away from a small town to a bigger city, and finding a circle of LGBTIQ+ friends, essentially increased her body's capabilities to connect with other bodies – for example, in the form of relationships. Emma explains:

I moved to Helsinki and at some point started to look for other rainbow people [a common expression for LGBTIQ+ people in Finland]. I felt like I hadn't had enough such people around me who would share that kind of reality, and then I found a group of people, and soon I also met my next long-term partner in that group.

This kind of friendship circle was often a very important source of support and sharing in interviewees' lives. Friends' support also helped them in the process of coming out to their parents. Often, over the course of their lives, interviewees' parents met their partners of different genders and came to accept and like them. However, it was striking in the data that even after the participants had lived in LGBTIQ+ culture for a long time, and had had partners of different genders, in their family relationship assemblages, powerful positive affects such as happiness were repeatedly assembled to their relationships with cis men.

Interviewees' relationships with cis men seemed to assemble especially with their mothers' vitality and happiness. For example, Pia related in an understanding tone that her "parents haven't had it easy," since her sister was also bisexual and was married to a woman. She reckoned "my mother is even more happy about Martti," her husband, the reason simply being that "Martti is a man."

A mother's happiness could also be intensified through the fact that the daughter "didn't become a lesbian," as Marja humorously explained:

Now we [Marja and Thomas] have two children and a dog and an estate car, so my mother must be as happy as a person can be (laughs): I didn't become a lesbian after all, and gave her grandchildren and everything.

This sheds light on how women's bisexuality affected their family relationship assemblages differently, depending on the other assembled elements – for example, the gender of their partner. However, the happiness assembled with male partners might make it difficult for bisexual bodies to be open to non-heterosexual relationships. Further, affective intensities assembled around mixed-sex relationships might give rise to ambivalent feelings in bisexual women if they knew their female relationships were not similarly embraced by their family members.

Crossing the homo/hetero binary and rebounding

Although in most family relationship assemblages, a mixed-sex relationship remained the celebrated "happy object" (Ahmed, 2010), family members

could also regard a bisexual woman's new male partner with mistrust after her separation from a long-term female relationship. In Laura's family relationship assemblage, strong affective intensities were assembled around her crossing the homo/hetero binary.

According to Deleuze and Guattari's (2004) notion of the rhizomatic organisation of assemblages, a part of an assemblage can always be plugged into another assemblage, where it can grow along its old line or along a new line. Yet in Laura's family relationship assemblage, a relationship with a male partner could not be smoothly plugged into her history of an established female relationship. Rather, her crossing the homo/hetero binary created a rupture that resembled typical negative reactions to a person coming out as homosexual – anger, sadness, disapproval, and disbelief. These negative reactions were now plugged into Laura's family relationship assemblage, hampering her bisexual becoming.

In the following extract, Laura accounts for her family members' reactions to her new male partner after she broke up with her long-term female spouse, with whom she had been in a registered partnership and had three children together:

My parents didn't understand this choice *at all* ... especially my father had a bigger problem with the fact that I had started to date a man. It wasn't a straightforward condemnation of it from his part, but he mourned it intensely that I had broken up with Heli and all the difficulties related to it ... and then my mother asked me straight out what does this mean, does it mean that now I have come to the conclusion that I want to be with men? ... That could be answered straight, that it does not mean that, but rather it's life and things happen ... then my sister thought that I'm not capable of heterosexual sex ... that it is somehow physically difficult for me, or repulsive, and then I turned down that idea as well ... and then my ex-partner Heli could not understand how Jari could be interested in me, because she thought I had a lesbian haircut and that I dress in a very unfeminine way, and also suspected that Jari must be secretly homosexual ... also my sister thought that Jari is only interested in me because I have small children and he has to be a paedophile.

In the interview, Laura often spoke about her feminist political stance, a world-view she had shared with her ex-partner, Heli: "We formed together a strong view of how we wanted to lead our lives, which was based on gender." During Laura and Heli's relationship, female relationships and rainbow families engaged in various political struggles in Finland. When I first interviewed them as a couple, the registered partnership law for same-sex couples (Act 950/2001) had been in effect for only three years. It was not until 2017 that marriage became gender-neutral in Finland (Act 98/2017). In the face of these legal struggles, Laura and Heli had been very political about their family. This might have given energy to the doubt and confusion

within Laura's family relationship assemblage in the face of her new male spouse.

Moreover, this was also fuelled by the homo/hetero binary as a territorialising force. As Laura's parents and family members had gone through the emotional work of "accepting" their daughter's female relationship, this possibly made them "rebound" in the form of irrational accusations when Laura started to date a man – as if the emotional work of acceptance had been "all for nothing." As Laura put it, "After they had chewed it [her relationship with Heli] over for a while, they found that this is actually a good idea, that a relationship with a woman is actually a much better option – and there was some kind of idealisation attached to it."

In the interview, Laura's expressions of her own discomfort with what looked like heterosexual coupledness was assembled in close sequence with her depictions of her family's inconvenience with her new male partner. Her own palpable discomfort at moving from a woman-centred life to life with a man resonated with her family members', lack of comfort and one seemed to give energy to the other. For Laura, feminist politics meant, for example, taking a critical approach to heteronormative cultural conventions such as romance. She felt uneasy about appearing with her male partner in public, where she was plugged into a heterosexual assemblage. She said miserably, "I cannot escape it, however differently I might experience it, and the other party [her current male spouse] understands it and is sensitive towards it." She continued: "I hardly show any affection to him in public ... somehow it is uncomfortable for me, and there's also a sense of shame attached to it, it is somehow embarrassing for me." As there is hardly any visible bisexual political movement in Finland (Kangasvuo, 2014), Laura's new relationship could not easily be assembled with her woman-centred feminist commitments. Rather, her relational assemblage created strong affective intensities with negative tones, such as shame. Combined with her family's affective reactions, this contributed to the diminished vitality of Laura's bisexual body.

Friendship circles blocking bisexual becomings

Although bisexual women in both sets of interviews mentioned their friends, both inside and outside LGBTIQA+ circles, as an important and continuous source of support in their lives, on some occasions these friendships were difficult to sustain through a breakup, both for the women themselves and for the friends. For many bisexual women who had dated women, their friendship circles – which often consisted of lesbian, bisexual, and queer women or (queer) feminist groups – were very important. When they started to date cis men, this could mean ruptures, tensions, and even rifts within their circle of friends. Pia explained:

Dating Martti and getting married to him led to my best friend, my ex-best friend ... her girlfriend once burst out when she was drunk that

this friend of mine does not accept me getting married [to Martti] – she had promised to be my chief bridesmaid, but then I found out that she doesn't quite accept my fiancé and then it led to that we haven't been in touch for a year.

This had affected the whole friendship circle, which consisted mainly of women and their girlfriends or wives:

It's been bad, because I haven't seen certain friends who I would mostly see at parties. I haven't gone to those parties, because I didn't want to face Helena [her ex-best friend]. So I'm somewhat isolated now in this [small town].

Apart from Helena, Pia saw some of her other friends from their friendship circle separately, but she no longer met them as a group. The affective rupture between the two friends had the power to disrupt and rearrange relationships in the whole friendship circle assemblage, without anyone's overt intention. When I asked her about it, Pia pondered repeatedly whether Martti could not be integrated into the friendship circle because of his gender. The matter seemed more complex, and also to depend on the elements from which his masculinity was assembled: "Maybe it's been like why am I no longer together with Kalle, who liked knitting. Like, why am I together with Martti, who likes motorbikes."

Thus, when a bisexual woman started to date a partner with a different gender – or a differently gendered partner – from their previous partner, they did not always fit into their social circle as easily as they had previously done. This sometimes meant losing a friend, or a circle of friends. Here Kaja describes the becoming of a social circle in a gender studies community:

That community was a system in itself, which had developed its own norms and rules ... It was for me personally quite a harsh observation that when I was in that female relationship ... we were welcome everywhere, to all social occasions. ... We fitted in very well (laughs) ... but then when all of a sudden I was dating a man, who was a bit of a bloke, had a beard, and was like this ordinary straight man, I started to get occasional comments that I am a scab, or that I have made a wrong choice. For me it was like, what the hell, we talk here about tolerance and ethics and making space for all sexualities and genders and their diversity – that is not being actualised here at all! It's like you have to be like this and that and that, so that you fit into this thing ... which is quite the opposite of everything really being okay ... like that the masculine men were as okay as the masculine women, or that straight men were as okay as lesbian women. And then I made a bit of a break from it ... although I'm grateful for that time and for what I got there.

In Kaja's description, the gender studies social circle was a community where relationships between women had become a norm. When she started to date a cis man, she was told that she had made the wrong choice. She experienced this as pressure to be of a certain kind in order to fit into the group. This went strongly against how sexual diversity was spoken about within the community, where the diversity of all genders and sexualities was supposedly embraced. When Kaja tried to make sense of this, she painted a wishful picture of a world where a masculine man was as acceptable as a masculine woman and a straight man as acceptable as a lesbian woman. Yet as I listened to Kaja, I could not help but think that there are very few spaces that resemble her description of the gender studies social circle, where a masculine woman or relationships between women are the norm – in most spaces the situation is exactly the opposite.

Thus, although the exclusiveness of this particular community clearly echoes binegative sentiments, the underlying territorialising force that steers the becoming of this community seems to be the power relation that places heterosexual relationships and masculine men at the top of the hierarchy. Since this is almost always the case, the community's space – where the situation was reversed for once – was protected. Yet both sides effectively blocked bisexual bodies from becoming: the feminist/queer/gender studies community because (cis)male partners were not appreciated, and mainstream culture because queer/same-sex partners could not be accepted. As the gender studies social circle could not give energy to the becoming of a bisexual body, for Kaja there was no option but to leave the community.

Kaja describes in the interview how since that time she has been able to explore what was discussed in theory within the gender studies circle regarding the diversity of sexualities and genders. This has turned from theory to lived experience for her. She now embraces the playfulness of tantra as a way to enhance her body's vitality and energy:

At one event we danced, and all of a sudden I had this orgasmic, ecstatic feeling that my body is jiggling and wiggling – an intense, strong experience of pleasure about my body, which is full of energy, and which jiggles.

Kaja explains: "At the moment I feel that the limitations [regarding gender and sexuality] are inside me if they are anywhere, and I can be as wild as I want to be, or as wild as I dare to be." She experiences tantra as a way to exceed her own embodied gendered and sexualised limitations (see also Kolehmainen, 2019).

Nevertheless, the homo/hetero binary also steers the becoming of the tantra community, as Kaja describes most of the tantra courses she attends as being full of mixed-sex couples. She says she knows about a teacher who

teaches gay tantra courses, especially abroad. If she were with a woman, she would probably attend these, but it would not be comfortable to do so with her current male partner.

The hierarchical homo/hetero binary is a strong territorialising force that is hard to escape, wherever bisexual women find themselves in their lives. As there are still very few bisexual spaces in Finland (Kangasvuo, 2014), becoming bisexual often requires living in various social circles segmented by the homo/hetero distinction. Yet through these becomings across different relational assemblages, women often traverse the homo/hetero binary, and thus the becoming of their bodies can be thought of as a bisexual becoming. Through these becomings, they form hybrids where their previous experiences of female relationships, their feminist world views, and solidarity between women are reassembled into new social assemblages, affecting the latter's lines of becoming.

Friendship circles energising bisexual bodies

In some cases, bisexual women's friendship circles are hybrids that vitalise the becomings of their bisexual bodies. Marja calls her bisexuality a "mother's sexuality," referring to how she raises her children to accept all sexualities and genders. She explains:

I guess honestly it is quite a straight life that we live now ... pointless to try to prove that one is somehow different or deviant, yes, yes. But at least half of the boy's godmothers are lesbians (laughs).

Yet her lesbian friends and her son's godmothers do not only have an educational function in the son's life. Spending time with them also energises Marja's bisexual body. She explains:

In the summer, when I go to see women's baseball, maybe it is somehow related [to my sexuality] ... I went to the ice hockey game with Olli and his godmother once, and there were quite a lot of female couples there in the audience ... so it felt a bit like isn't this a bit like a lesbian thing to come here and watch ice hockey. And I thought when I was there with Olli's godmother ... do the others think that we are a couple with her ... But maybe it was only my interpretation (laughs).

Marja describes the scene of going with her lesbian friend to an ice hockey game and seeing many female couples in the audience. By seeing herself through other female couples' eyes as part of a lesbian couple, Marja could temporarily become with the lesbian assemblage. The idea of being recognised as part of a lesbian couple by other female couples seemed to give her joy and energise her bisexual becoming.

Discussion

This chapter makes a unique contribution to existing literature on how couple relationships begin, thrive, and end in social contexts. It extends current perspectives by including bisexual relationship breakups. Further, it suggests that LGBTIQ+ breakups cannot be approached as a unitary whole, and that there might instead be important differences within LGBTIQ+ break-ups. The analysis has revealed some specific issues relevant to bisexual relationships and breakups.

But instead of focusing on how bisexual identities are experienced or negotiated in the context of relationships (or breakups) (Gustavson, 2009; Lynch & Maree, 2013), or how binegative sentiments affect bisexual people's relationships (DeCapua, 2017; Hayfield et al., 2018; Klesse, 2011), this chapter offers a novel perspective on the becoming of bisexualities with social relationships after breakups. In my analysis, bisexuality's function was not determined by participants' identities but by the specific assemblages it formed with other bodies, relationships, and affects. The assembled relationships and affects had the power to (dis)connect bisexual bodies with (from) other bodies, affects, and relationships, steering them in different directions.

Hierarchical and binary notions of sexuality and gender often gave energy to the intensification of affects (with a positive or negative tone) when bisexual women started to date a partner whose gender was different from that of their previous partner. Yet as all assemblages are complex and unique, the gender of the bisexual woman's partner mattered differently depending on the other elements and relationships in the assemblage: what relationship forms, genders, and sexualities were most respected, what the women's political commitments were, and how their previous relationships had been sequenced before the breakups.

The hierarchical homo/hetero binary and heteronormativity as territorialising forces were hard to escape, wherever bisexual women found themselves in their lives. These forces had the power to (dis)connect bisexual bodies with (from) their relational assemblages. This could radically diminish the vitality of bisexual bodies and their capability to connect with other bodies. However, the bisexual becomings often continued as the bisexual bodies were connected to other relational assemblages, affecting the latter's lines of becoming.

This analysis shows that when we study social networks after relationship breakups, it is important to attend to their dynamic processes, which are affected by gendered and sexualised power dynamics as well as the other relational and affective dynamics that come together in breakups. Yet it is important to analyse breakups in ways that do not reduce gender and sexuality to individual human subjects or stabilise sexual identity categories such as bisexuality in predictable, predefined ways. Rather, breakups and bisexualities should be thought as multiplicities in motion (Deleuze &

Guattari, 2004). Thus this chapter on the becoming of bisexual women's breakup assemblages is a beginning for a theorisation of multiple bisexual potentialities.

Note

- 1 For legibility, I have slightly modified the data extracts by adding punctuation marks and removing some meaningless words and utterances such as “hm,” “er,” “like.” Sometimes the interviewees' talk wandered off the topic or repeated what had already been said. Omissions of this kind of talk are marked with “...”.

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7 Bisexual women and monogamy

Sarah Jane Daly

Introduction

In contemporary Western society, bisexuality has increasingly become recognised as a legitimate and valid sexual identity. However, there are inevitable tensions between bisexual identity and monogamy. This chapter explores these tensions by drawing on historical and contemporary research. Previous research has tended to concentrate on monogamy from a mononormative perspective, focusing on heterosexual and/or homosexual relationships. Consequently, the experiences of bisexual women and monogamy have received little attention from researchers. This chapter begins with a review of the bisexual literature in a bid to outline a more in-depth and focused description and understanding of both the historical and contemporary perspectives of bisexuality as an accepted sexual identity and orientation. The author then discusses the ways in which monogamy has been conceptualised historically before moving on to briefly present contemporary views of monogamy in Western society. The chapter then focuses specifically on bisexual women and monogamy. In particular, this chapter draws from the current literature specifically related to the challenges faced by bisexual women when they are involved in a monogamous relationship.

Binary understandings of sexuality

Sexuality has been conceptualised in binary terms for well over a century (Callis, 2014). “The elephant in the room” is a metaphor used to illustrate how discussions and representations of bisexuality are kept on the fringes of the sexuality binary (Hartman, 2006). The binary is exhaustive in the sense that at one end it is exclusively heterosexual and at the other it is homosexual. Thus, sexualities that do not fit into those contested categories are rendered mute and invisible (Anderson, McCormack, & Ripley, 2016; Klesse, 2006). The binary opposites both reify and strengthen one another in the respect that they are hinged on each other’s continuation in order to exist (Namaste, 1994). One of the problems when attempting to conceptualise oneself outside the binary is the resulting ethereal space one inhabits (Daly, 2018).

Callis (2014) uses the metaphor of the “borderlands” to illustrate non-normative identities. This concept originated from the work of Anzaldúa (1987), who attributed it to individuals who lived on, and crossed over, the border between Mexico and the United States. Anzaldúa (1987, p. 243) notes the liminal space these people occupied, referring to it as “an unstable, unpredictable, precarious, always in transition space lacking clear boundaries”. Callis (2014) notes the similarities between the individuals Anzaldúa describes and those who hold plurisexual identities. Both groups can be seen to be on the border of two dominant power-houses: heterosexual and homosexual, Mexico and the United States. Both groups are betwixt and between, not fitting in to either/or. Callis, (2014, p. 69) argues that, just like the individuals discussed by Anzaldúa (1987), bisexual people and other plurisexual identified people are “caught between two communities and two labels”.

One could argue that to understand bisexuality, one has to refer to the binary of monosexuality. Bisexuality, then, can be seen to hold the potential to problematise the binary and break down assumptive discourses related to sexual orientation and identity (Stein & Plummer, 1994). The lesbian feminist and gay liberation movements of the mid- to late twentieth century were constructed in terms of an oppressed minority struggling against a heterosexual and patriarchal majority. One of the unintended consequences of this struggle was the acceptance in everyday discourse that there are only the dominant oppositional sexualities. More recently, identity categories such as bisexual, transgender, and transsexual have been acknowledged and have become considerably more visible (Maliapaard, 2017).

Historical conceptualisations of monogamy in Western society

Views about the nature of monogamy in Western society – particularly monogamy through the sanctioned institution of marriage (Rust, 2003) – position the monogamous dyadic relationship as the most successful and valid type of relationship (Green, Valleriani, & Adam, 2016). The monogamous dyad is also considered the site in which the needs of both partners can be met, albeit not easily and not without some degree of commitment and work. This is, however, a relatively modern conception of monogamy and is somewhat different from constructions of monogamy historically and in other cultures (Barker, 2011; Giddens, 1992).

In the late Victorian era, Von Krafft-Ebing (1894) proposed the view that sexual desire is something that needs taming – particularly in men – as it is dangerous if left to its own devices. He argued that morality tames the explosive nature of sexual desire and that monogamy sets some boundaries on this power. Von Krafft-Ebing (1894, p. 5) states that

the fact that in higher civilization human love must be monogamous and rest on a lasting contract was thus recognized. If nature does not more than provide for procreation, a commonwealth (family or state)

cannot exist without a guarantee that the offspring shall flourish physically, morally and intellectually ... establishing monogamous marriage and securing it by legal, religious and moral ties.

Von Krafft-Ebing's (1894) message is clear; in order to secure a stable future for children, parents ought to engage in a monogamous relationship. Monogamy for men is a moral and respectable way in which their sexual needs can be met. Von Krafft-Ebing (1894) also argued that women did not experience sexual desire in the same way as men. Women's desire is to be understood as being focused predominantly on love, rather than being driven by sexual desire. This enabled women to be positioned as persons who served the needs of their husbands and cared for their children.

The views of Von Krafft-Ebing (1894) were influential through the early part of the twentieth century, but have received a critical reception from academics more recently. For example, Savoia (2010) argues that Von Krafft-Ebing (1894) was instrumental in creating a set of myths about women that contributed to their subjugation. In a similar vein, Szasz (1980, p. 45) states:

Von Krafft-Ebing ... was not interested in liberating men and women from the shackles of sexual prejudice or the constraints of anti-sexual legislation. On the contrary, he was interested in supplanting the waning power of the church with the waxing power of medicine.

On the other hand, Oosterhuis (2012) argues that Von Krafft-Ebing modernised sexuality and, despite his Christian views in relation to gender roles, did advocate the view that men and women were equals.

Coontz (2005) maintains that it was not until the 1950s that the majority of people in Western society could afford to marry for reasons of love and sexual desire. Although the moral superiority of monogamy was challenged by some writers in the Victorian era, by the mid-twentieth century the dominant discourse was that marriage and monogamy were "normal". This also resulted in monogamy being conceptualised as the "traditional" relationship practice, which was far from being an accurate representation of social history. The 1960s marked a generational shift in attitudes towards relationships and extra-marital sex (Edmunds & Turner, 2005). The contraceptive pill was released in the United Kingdom in 1961 – initially to married women only, before becoming available to all in 1967 (Bridge, 2007). This social change, alongside others, such as the improvement of women's position in the workplace (Goodson, 2001), marked a shift in the way sex and relationships were perceived. Feminists saw this development as freeing women up to engage in consensual sex without the fear of an unwanted pregnancy. In addition, many feminists, especially radical lesbian feminists, saw this medical advance as an opportunity for women to challenge heterosexual patriarchy and advocated a reconceptualisation and redefinition of practices such as monogamy (Summerfield, 1994). The late 1960s and

1970s could be seen as a time of sexual and social experimentation, with women questioning taken-for-granted assumptions about their social and relationship roles and behaviours. This led to many feminists choosing to reject monogamy in their intimate relationships. However, by the 1980s, and in the throes of the HIV and AIDS epidemic, many feminist heterosexual women returned to monogamy as they reported experiences of being treated disrespectfully by their male partners, and fearing potential sexual infection (Bindel, 2013). For many same-sex attracted people, claims related to non-heterosexual people being in better positions to “construct their relationships from scratch” (Heaphy, Donovan, & Weeks, 2004, p. 168) were sidelined in favour of practising their relationships in the same fashion as the majority of heterosexuals: in a monogamous dyad. The monogamous couple relationship continued to be central to social life, with romantic films, songs and family politics reinforcing the monogamous, mononormative relationship arrangement (Ahmed, 2010). Sexual exclusivity in intimate relationships became positioned as the normal and moral way in which to live out one’s love relationship.

Historically, then, we have a picture of monogamy as a concept that has changed over time. The Victorian era marked a shift in views from a tolerance of non-monogamy evident in the eighteenth century to a position that saw monogamy as an essential component of a relationship. The idea that sexual desire was different for men and women was actively promoted by the scientific community towards the end of the nineteenth century (e.g. Von Krafft-Ebing, 1894). This set the scene for the development of ideologies around relationships and sexuality that dominated the first half of the twentieth century and beyond.

Contemporary views on monogamy

Despite the changes in views and beliefs about sexuality and relationships, monogamy is still considered an important social norm. Findings from the National Survey of Sexual Attitudes and Lifestyles (NSSAL) (Erens et al., 2003) show that monogamy continues to be considered important in committed relationships and/or marriages, with 77 per cent of men and 85 per cent of women reporting that sex outside of a relationship is *wrong*. Although large-scale social surveys, such as the NSSAL, are valuable sources of information about general social views and attitudes, they are not able to explore issues in detail. They do not, for example, provide any insights into the reasons why respondents consider infidelity to be “wrong”.

Green, Valleriani and Adam (2016) carried out a study that explored contemporary views on monogamy in depth. Their participants were predominantly white and identified as heterosexual, gay, or lesbian. In response to questions about monogamy, participants’ attitudes generally fell into two broad groups: those who took a “normative approach” and those who took a “reflexive approach” (Green, Valleriani & Adam, 2016, p. 422). The

“normative” group expressed the view that there was little point getting married or committing to a monogamous relationship if their partner behaved in non-monogamous way. In other words, this group valued the principles of monogamy and were prepared to commit to these values in a relationship. The “reflexive” group expressed the view that what individuals do in the context of their own relationships is up to them. In other words, their values and beliefs were less constrained by social norms and ideologies.

Green, Valleriani and Adam (2016) went on to look at how their participants conceptualised monogamy within their own relationships and again identified two broad groups: “structured” and “plastic” (Green, Valleriani & Adam, 2016, p. 422). The “structured” group believed that, while non-monogamous practices might be acceptable for other people, they were not drawn to conducting their intimate relationship in that way, preferring to follow a “normative” approach to relationships. Those in the “plastic” belief group were more open to the possibility that sexual activity outside the context of their relationship was something that would have to be considered and negotiated, but they were not directly opposed to it.

What is particularly interesting about this particular piece of research is that it presents evidence that heterosexual, gay, and lesbian participants hold different attitudes towards monogamy. Heterosexual participants – particularly women – while professing to accept how other people constructed their relationships as being unproblematic, were themselves less likely to implement any alternative behaviours in their own relationships. In part, this may be due to social norms of monogamy and coupledness in relationships (particularly normative heterosexual ones) being so pervasive that implementing changes in one’s own relationship presents too challenging a prospect to consider. It is also reasonable to suggest that women face particularly negative judgements with respect to their sexuality and behaviours more generally (Bindel, 2013); thus, to carry out their love/sex relationships in a non-monogamous fashion might well be framed as unfeminine and immoral.

According to Green, Valleriani and Adam (2016), this finding demonstrates that heterosexual people are tolerant to those who choose to lead their relationships in a “plastic” fashion, while at the same time holding an “it’s ok for you, but not me” attitude. Lesbian and gay participants were much more likely to opt for a plastic belief position, in that they (particularly gay men) were seen to engage in open dialogue with their partner in relation to meeting each other’s sexual and emotional needs. Green, Valleriani and Adam (2016) concluded that, in relation to monogamy, heterosexual people were much less critical of the institutional practice and took an explicit positive stance toward monogamy. However, their gay and lesbian counterparts could be seen to take a more pragmatic approach to monogamy, implying more discussion related to the relationship style effectively being fit for their purpose.

An important methodological point in relation to Green, Valleriani and Adam’s (2016) research is that a number of participants were interviewed

alongside their partners. Although some research espouses the positive aspects of interviewing couples together to enable richer data generation (see Bjørnholt & Farstad, 2014), it has also been argued that the presence of a partner can influence (both positively and negatively) what is expressed (Valentine, 1999). Nevertheless, their research does demonstrate that beliefs about monogamy vary across different groups in society.

Barker (2011) argues that views about monogamy are typically implicit in relationships, and overt discussions about the subject are relatively rare. A monogamous relationship requires couples to ensure that others are “kept out”, which is reflected in social norms relating to the notion that couples have “couple time” on their own. Social norms such as this support an ideology that finding a partner and engaging in a monogamous relationship is the path to a happy life. Gotta and colleagues (2011) conducted research in the United States, drawing on a range of professed sexual orientations, including heterosexual, gay, and lesbian, comparing couples’ aspiration for a monogamous relationship. Their findings suggest that couples in the year 2000 desired and engaged in monogamy more than couples did in 1975. This appears to indicate that monogamy continues to be a desired form of relationship. It is nevertheless interesting to note that the researchers received responses from only one member of the couple relationships; thus, surveying or interviewing individuals may lead to different outcomes as compared with interviewing individuals when the partner is present. It is also plausible to consider the suggestion that a greater awareness of diseases such as AIDS and other STIs has led to a more active focus on healthcare behaviours (Moors, Matsick, & Schechinger, 2017). Gotta and colleagues (2011) present evidence that monogamy agreements between all couples, irrespective of sexual identity, were more explicit in 2000 than they were in 1975. This may reflect changes to the legal and social rights afforded to individuals in the United States between 1975 and 2000. In 1975, civil unions were not available to same-sex attracted people, but by 2000 some states in the United States sanctioned them, which may have some influence on the desire for, and views on, monogamous relationships.

Warner (1999, p. 74) argues that positioning monogamy as the most important relationship practice serves to encourage “damaging hierarchies of respectability”, framing alternative relationship styles such as polyamory as inferior (Pieper & Bauer, 2005). Little attention has been paid to relationship practices that lie outside monogamy, despite growing numbers of people professing to be engaged in consensual non-monogamy (CNM) (Barker, 2011). In a review of the monogamy literature Moors, Matsick and Schechinger (2017, p. 677) suggest that, irrespective of sexual identity, people in modern Western society express moderate to high positive attitudes towards “a hypothetical willingness to engage in different types on consensual non-monogamy”. It is important to note that many of the studies on which Moors, Matsick and Schechinger (2017) draw are taken from convenience samples and are cross-sectional in design, making it difficult to

determine whether this view is transitory and/or likely to change over time. In addition, because participants are responding to a hypothetical scenario, they may well be appraising a situation favourably precisely because they are not currently experiencing this relationship arrangement.

It is clear that the ideology of monogamy remains dominant in twenty-first century Western society. Monogamy continues to be thought of as a practice that provides individuals with both security and safety. Therefore, the ideology of monogamy retains its position at the top of the relationship hierarchy.

Monogamy and bisexual women: Myths and realities

The influence of gender, and more specifically identifying as a bisexual woman, brings with it a number of specific binegative assumptions related to both character and behaviour (Callis, 2014):

When I think of ‘bisexual’ I think of bedhopping ... they not only can’t commit to being one or the other, but probably can’t commit to whoever they’re with, be it male or female. How could someone who wants to be in a long-term committed relationship still call themselves bisexual ... without some infidelity coming into the picture?

(Ault, 1994, p. 117)

This quote succinctly encapsulates one of the common myths faced by bisexual women, particularly with respect to the assumption that bisexual women are more likely to be hyper-sexual than men (Lahti, 2015). There is a belief that the very nature of bisexuality makes it impossible to maintain a monogamous relationship (Callis, 2014). To a large extent, this is based on the assumption that women who claim a bisexual identity are unable to practise monogamy because they are assumed to be naturally promiscuous (Chmielewski & Yost, 2013). A set of negative stereotypes appears to be associated with the sexual behaviour of women who identify as bisexual. One of the consequences of these stereotypes is that bisexual women who do practise monogamy feel invisible, since they are assumed not to exist in the first place (Hartman-Linck, 2014). Occupying a dyadic relationship, particularly one that is monogamous, brings with it a sense of invisibility with respect to one’s bisexual identity in both heterosexual and homosexual communities (Bowes-Catton & Hayfield, 2015).

The myth of the “promiscuous bisexual” clearly contributes to the view that bisexual women are incapable of securing and retaining a monogamous relationship. This belief seems to be rooted in a binary construction of sexuality that, by definition, excludes the whole concept of a distinct and separate “bisexual” identity. Attempting to conceptualise bisexuality within a binary system results in some form of part-heterosexual, part-homosexual hybrid, which in turn leads to further mythical beliefs, such as that bisexual

people are in a state of internal psychological conflict because they are unable to satisfy their sexual desires (Diamond, 2008). In other words, the assumption is that if a bisexual person is in a relationship with a person of a different sex, they will have a need for sexual and/or intimate connections with a person of the same sex. If they have committed to a monogamous dyadic relationship, then this assumed need is not likely to be met and as such they are thought to be in a state of internal conflict (Roberts, Horne, & Hoyt, 2015).

It has been argued that the common characteristic of bisexual people “is their refusal to practice gendered exclusivity” (Rust, 1995, p. 241), which positions them as insecure and untrustworthy (Flanders, Dobinson, & Logie, 2015). The perception that entering into a monogamous relationship with a bisexual person would present real challenges is pervasive. Eliason (2000) found that 75 per cent of participants who took part in her research preferred not to date a person who identified as bisexual, partly due to the stereotypical belief that the person could not be faithful and would no doubt leave them for someone of a different sex. Vrangalova, Bukberg, and Rieger (2014) further support this finding in that those who have stigmatised identities, such as bisexual people, report finding it more problematic to secure a relationship. Bradford (2004) also concluded that her participants were concerned they could not attain a romantic relationship because they identified as bisexual and were hyper-aware of how they were positioned in society, making it a barrier to finding someone to be with.

Hartman-Linck (2014) explored the lives of bisexually identified women in monogamous different-sex relationships and found that participants engaged in a number of strategies, such as reading LGBT+ orientated literature, in an attempt to keep their bisexuality alive. Participants were considered to be monogamous if they met two criteria: they had to have been in a relationship for at least a year, and in the last 12 months they must only have had sex with their partner. One of the problems with this definition is that it perpetuates the view that physical monogamy is more important and valued than other forms of monogamy. Anderson (2010) points out that monogamy can be defined in a number of ways, but the belief that monogamy means “no sex outside the relationship” remains a dominant social norm (Fisher, 2010).

There are conflicting views about the extent to which bisexual women desire a monogamous relationship. Some research (see Rodríguez-Rust, 2000) seems to suggest that bisexual women are more likely than other sexual orientations to desire a non-monogamous relationship. Other research argues that bisexual women prefer a monogamous dyadic relationship compared with other relationship forms, such as polyamory (Rust, 1995). It seems to be the case that for some bisexual women, having concurrent relationships with people of the same and different sex represents a way in which they feel that they are truly living out their bisexuality (Moss, 2012). One of the ways in which this lifestyle may be achieved is to have

discreet affairs with someone who is of a different sex from one's current partner. Clearly this course of action is abhorrent to many bisexual people, as it involves deception and dishonesty, and confirms stereotypical views of bisexual people as not to be trusted (Klesse, 2007). There is no doubt that some bisexual people engage in sexual and romantic relationships with people of the same and different sex concurrently (as do other sexualities such as gay, lesbian, and heterosexual), but many bisexual people prefer to opt for monogamous relationships (Toft & Yip, 2018). This is a view supported by Diamond (2008), who concludes that women who identify as bisexual are more likely than self-identified lesbian and unlabelled women to actively desire and reside in a monogamous relationship. This finding contradicts the pervading stereotype that positions bisexual women as unable to be monogamous. The reality is that some bisexual people (alongside all other sexual orientations) choose to practise monogamy, whether serially or with one person "forever".

Monogamy and bisexual invisibility

It is argued here that monogamy contributes to bisexual invisibility and marginalisation. Moss (2012) explored the experiences of plurisexually identified women (including bisexual and pansexual women) who were married to men and in a relationship with a woman at the same time. She uses the term "doing bisexuality" (Moss, 2012, p. 406) to describe the practice of physically "doing" or engaging in relationships with people of the same and different sex. Moss (2012) argues that this is one way in which married women can be visible, as they are able to express their bisexuality as well as disrupt ideas around the family and monogamy. This is problematic because it suggests and reinforces the notion that being in concurrent relationships with people of the same and different sex is the only legitimate way to claim the identity label of bisexual. Consequently, those bisexual women who choose monogamy are more likely to have one aspect of their identity – their sexuality – marginalised and invisible to others.

The concept of sexual subjectivity, which Tolman (2002, p. 5) defines as "the experience of oneself as a sexual being who feels entitled to sexuality and sexual pleasure and sexual safety", is also relevant to discussions of marginalisation. Sexual subjectivity is considered important in the context of one's self-esteem in that a person's sexual identity has an impact on how they navigate their way through the world. Given that women and girls are brought up in a patriarchal society, it is vital that their sexualities and their bodies are not rendered "silent" (Tolman, 2002). Bisexual women who are in monogamous relationships with men may well experience their sexual subjectivity differently from those in relationships with women. Feminists argue that positive sexual subjectivity is particularly challenging for women to construct, regardless of sexuality, because they grow up in a sociocultural environment where their sexuality is policed by men; as a result, they tend

to conceptualise their sexuality from a male perspective (Horne & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2006). Women occupy a heteronormative and mononormative world that positions them as heterosexual if their partner is someone of a different sex. If their partner is of the same sex, then women continue to be assumed potentially available to men as their sexuality is often considered performative for men (Fahs, 2009). The consequence is that whether a woman is in a monogamous different-sex or same-sex relationship, her bisexual identity remains hidden (Barker, 2011).

Whenever a bisexual woman enters into a monogamous relationship with a man, her non-normative sexual identity is more or less hidden from the world. Clearly, in some cases others may be aware of an individual's sexual identity; however, there is still the potential for it to become overlooked and invisible. For example, being in a monogamous relationship with a man can lead to claims from others that a woman's bisexuality was a "phase" she was going through, or perhaps that she was doing it to seek out the attention (Daly, King, & Yeadon-Lee, 2018). Monogamy presents more challenges to bisexual people than to people of other sexual identities in relation to invisibility. A bisexual woman who has children and is in a monogamous relationship with a man is to the onlooker, assumed to have a heterosexual identity (Moss, 2012), as she is defined according to the gender of her partner; thus, her bisexual identity is rendered invisible. When a bisexual woman enters into a monogamous relationship with a woman, she faces similar challenges, with the additional consequences associated with moving away from heteronormativity. Being in a relationship with a woman brings with it the additional pressure and expectations to accept a lesbian identity and to no longer consider oneself as a bisexual woman (Daly et al., 2018). This set of expectations may not come directly from her partner, but instead be levelled at her from the wider lesbian community (Callis, 2014). This situation has been likened to a "tightrope walk", in which a bisexual woman in a relationship with another woman has to balance the pros and cons of expressing her bisexual identity (Anderson et al., 2016). Perhaps it is indeed only through verbal statements that women can be confident that their bisexuality is known (Maliepaard, 2017).

Wiley and Deaux (2010) argue that visibility in relation to one's sexual identity is important, and contributes to the extent to which individuals feel connected to others as well as a means by which they can become involved in social action. One of the challenges faced by bisexual women is that there are no universal physical appearance norms that specifically signify bisexuality (Hayfield, 2011). Research found that one challenge faced by bisexual women when occupying a monogamous relationship, irrespective of the gender of their partner, is a feeling of identity invisibility both within wider heteronormative society, and also within the LGBT+ community (Hartman-Linck, 2014). This invisibility manifests in different ways according to the gender of the women's partners. For example, those in same-sex relationships acknowledge that at times disclosing the gender of their partner results in

others assuming they are a lesbian. This misappropriation has both negative and positive consequences for these women. Access to and, more importantly, acceptance in lesbian spaces and places appears to be one of the advantages of not expressing one's attraction to more than one sex. However, at the same time, an awareness that their bisexuality remains hidden has personal repercussions for them in terms of their self-esteem. Often these women experience feelings of anxiety and guilt for not disclosing their bisexuality. It is also the case that those women in different-sex relationships are aware of the heterosexual privileges associated with being partnered with a person of a different sex (Daly et al., 2018).

Conclusion

It is argued in this chapter that in contemporary Western society conceptualisations of monogamy are culturally ingrained into our relationship practices. Despite the practice of monogamy being problematic for some individuals (Toft & Yip, 2018), it is clear that monogamy is the most favoured sanctioned relationship practice in Western society. We can see that monogamy is institutionalised in our everyday lives through institutions such as marriage (Finn, 2012). Although a number of people happily practise CNM and report their relationships to be satisfying, many of them go on to enter into monogamous relationships (Jones, 2016). The culturally constructed ideology of monogamy permeates our everyday lives through narratives of such concepts as “love”, and finding one’s “soulmate”, as well as media depictions that position monogamous relationships as the most appropriate form. These discourses present us with what we understand to be the path to happiness and fulfilment. Despite the cultural inculcation of monogamy, it is important to acknowledge that monogamy is important to many people, irrespective of sexual identity. Monogamy represents and provides people with a sense of security and stability. The research related to how bisexual women in monogamous relationships negotiate their lives and experience their bisexual identity is relatively under-investigated (Daly et al., 2018). Research has pointed to the ways in which bisexual women may struggle with feelings of marginalisation and invisibility as a result of engaging in a monogamous relationship because their sexual identity is assumed to reflect the gender of their partner and relationship arrangement (Moss, 2012). It is important to consider the ways in which bisexual women experience their sexual subjectivity when they are engaged in a monogamous relationship, as research highlights the ways in which all women are inculcated into patriarchal society, which conceptualises their sexuality as a response to male sexuality. Bisexual women who are in monogamous same-sex relationships are therefore engaged in sexual relationships that do not include the participation of men, so they may well experience their bisexual identity somewhat differently from bisexual women in different-sex relationships and those who are not in an intimate relationship.

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8 “I think that I’m not a relationship person”

Bisexual women’s accounts of (internalised) binegativity in non-monogamous relationship narratives

Renate Baumgartner

Introduction

This chapter draws from the first Austrian qualitative study to be published on bisexuality. The aim is to show how deeply ingrained stereotypes can be, and how (internalised) binegativity is present in women’s accounts of unfaithfulness and bisexuality. Unfaithfulness is one of the most common stereotypes faced by bisexual women (Alarie & Gaudet, 2013; Ochs, 1996; Rust, 2003; Welzer-Lang, 2008). This means that those who seek to explore bisexuality and unfaithfulness are in danger of potentially perpetuating and feeding into problematic existent stereotypes. This work tries to circumvent this risk by setting out that the author takes an affirmative approach to bisexuality and by exploring the complexity and challenges of this topic for bisexual women living in non-monogamous relationships.

Individuals from stigmatised social groups are reported to be exposed to additional stressors because of their “minority” position. Meyer (2003, p. 35) takes the view that internalised stigma, expectations of rejection, and concealment of one’s identity reflect “minority stress processes”. These stressors are considered to be one cause of the poor psychological health that many bisexual people have been found to manifest (Jorm et al., 2002; Ross, Dobinson, & Eady, 2010). It is therefore crucial to investigate the lives and challenges of those with marginalised sexualities, including bisexual women. Internalised discrimination is defined as the internalisation of societal values, and is often understood to be invisible to the persons themselves (Meyer, 2003).

Previous work has either dealt with internalised stigma or the experienced discrimination of bisexual women, or has examined accounts of bisexual non-monogamous lives (Klesse, 2005; Robinson, 2013). This chapter provides an analysis of the complex interplay between (expected) unfaithfulness and different forms of (internalised) binegativity in the narratives of bisexual women who live non-monogamously. Some of the examples show

how women's perceptions and understandings of bisexuality and unfaithfulness may reflect internalised binegativity; others depict how experiences interplay with self-conceptions and inform coping strategies for (internalised) discrimination.

Defining binegativity

The terms "biphobia" and "binegativity" refer to negative understandings of bisexuality and associated oppressive practices, which include discrimination, violence, and the erasure of bisexual identities (Klesse 2011). Much of the existing literature uses the term "biphobia", which – similarly to "homophobia" – refers to a specific form of minority oppression (Flanders et al., 2016; Hoang, Holloway, & Mendoza, 2011; Ochs, 1996). The term "biphobia" evokes connotations of oppressive practices being born out of fear. In contrast, "binegativity" is a more nuanced term, and points more broadly to the negative attitudes with which bisexual people are confronted (Eliason, 2001). Therefore, I mostly use "binegativity", but draw on the term "biphobia" when quoting others' publications. A common form that binegativity takes is the belief in, and expression of, negative attitudes towards bisexual people. These binegative notions include the belief that bisexual people have an alleged propensity toward promiscuity, viewing bisexual people as unfaithful and untrustworthy, questioning the very existence of bisexual identities including the notion that bisexuality is just a phase, and suspecting bisexual individuals to be transmitters of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) (Eisner, 2013; Hertlein, Hartwell, & Munns, 2016; Ochs, 1996). Some of these notions are directed especially to certain groups of people. For instance, bisexual women are stereotypically hypersexualised. This happens even more if they are living non-monogamously (Klesse, 2005).

Being surrounded by antibisexual attitudes, either through direct interpersonal interaction or via societal discourses, can in turn easily lead to bisexual people "directing negative social values towards the self" (Meyer, 2003, p. 14). This "internalised binegativity" is therefore the internalisation of antibisexual societal values (Meyer, 2003; Ochs, 1996). For my own work, I found it useful to keep Meyer's (2003) concept of "minority stress" in mind. In his framework social attitudes, so called distal minority stress processes influence proximal minority stress processes like internalised stigma (e.g. binegativity), expectations of rejection, and concealment. Expecting rejection because of one's identity or experience (Bostwick, 2012; Meyer, 2003) is particularly pertinent to bisexual people, whose experiences of rejection by gay men, lesbians, and heterosexuals in general have been documented within the literature (Ault, 1994; Hayfield, Clarke, & Halliwell, 2014; Li et al., 2013). Since minority stress processes are hypothesised as one reason for the poor psychological health of some bisexual people (Ross et al., 2010), it is important to investigate how these inform the lives and actions of bisexual people. In this research, I chose to analyse how bisexual

participants’ understandings of bisexuality and unfaithfulness might reflect internalised binegativity. I use the term “internalised binegativity” to reflect the broad nature of negative societal attitudes toward bisexual people that are internalised, and in this way I distinguish the term from internalised biphobia, which is often used to describe the desire to change one’s (bisexual) identity (Bostwick, 2012). Additionally, I consider minority stress processes such as the concealment of one’s identity or having expectations of rejection because of one’s identity or experience (Meyer, 2003).

Research on internalised binegativity

Internalised phobias or negativities play an important role in the psychological wellbeing of sexual minorities and, appropriately, are the subject of psychological health research (Jorm et al., 2002; Meyer, 2003; Ross et al., 2010). Generally, the body of empirical literature on internalised binegativity is scarce. Hoang et al. (2011), for instance, describes a positive correlation between internalised binegativity and the unfaithfulness of bisexual women in her quantitative study on intimate relationships. Similar quantitative work, investigating the mental health of bisexual people, focuses instead on the fear of rejection and experiences of stigma and monosexism (Bostwick, 2012; Roberts, Horne, & Hoyt, 2015). Some binegativity research treats “internalised” binegativity as a secondary issue to experiencing the binegativity of others. The work of Flanders and colleagues (2016), for example, describes an “indicative” case of internalised binegativity, deriving from one participant’s ambivalent feelings towards her own identity. Another case is mentioned in the work of Li and colleagues (2013), which describes a participant’s negative attitude towards bisexuality stemming from her father’s bisexuality. However, none of the existing research focuses on internalised binegativity specifically in relation to the negative stereotype of bisexuality and unfaithfulness. This is therefore the first qualitative study exploring how bisexual women’s understandings of unfaithfulness, and the ways in which they position their bisexual relationship experiences, reflect (internalised) binegativity. Furthermore, this research also explores the strategies that bisexual women may develop to cope with their experiences of binegativity around unfaithfulness in relation to their relationship experiences.

Research on bisexual people and non-monogamy

Unfaithfulness has long been one of the most prominent antibisexual stereotypes (Eisner, 2013; Hertlein, Hartwell, & Munns, 2016; Ochs, 1996). This is a result of conceptualising bisexuality as a mixture of homosexuality and heterosexuality, and thereby conflating multiple attraction with a “need” to engage in behaviour with multiple partners. Therefore, bisexual people are understood to only be satisfied when having sex with men and women (or,

more recently, with other multiple sexes or genders), which positions them as inherently non-monogamous (Rust, 2003). Although consensually non-monogamous and polyamorous ways of living play a positive role in the lives of many bisexual people (Ritchie & Barker, 2007; Robinson, 2013), bisexuality should not be assumed to *necessarily* or always be conflated with polyamory or non-monogamy (Ochs, 1996). Still, bisexual people, as well as others who engage in non-monogamous/polyamorous relationships (or more recently specifically identify with non-monogamy/polyamory as identities), often face allegations of promiscuity (Klesse, 2005; Mint, 2004). Previous research describing the relationships of people living at the intersection of bisexuality and non-monogamy has focused on specific challenges for bisexual people, ways of negotiating relationships, and relationship forms as “strategies of sexual expression” (Robinson, 2013, p. 21; see also Klesse, 2005; McLean, 2004). Even if bisexual people live in monogamous relationships, it can still be challenging (see Chapter 7 of this book). Little research to date has dealt with the intersection of female bisexuality and non-monogamy, and the interweaving with minority stress processes such as (internalised) binegativity and expectations of rejection and concealment.

Methods

The research drew on interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) to engage in making sense of the participants making sense of their worlds (Smith, Flowers, & Osborn, 1997). The author takes a critical realist perspective (e.g. Bhaskar, 2008) in order to investigate how the interviewed participants make meaning of their bisexual relationship experiences and unfaithfulness, taking into account how those meanings may be shaped by their experiences, environment, expectations, and the situations in which they find themselves (Bhaskar, 2008; Danermark et al., 2002). By giving a voice to the experiences of women, this study also draws on a feminist perspective (e.g. Kitzinger, 2006).

Before the interview, participants were informed about the aim of the project and signed a consent form. The interviews were conducted in German, and extracts presented in this chapter are verbatim transcripts, which were translated by the author.¹ To protect the privacy of the participants, self-chosen pseudonyms were used and identifiable details (e.g. names and places) were changed. The interview structure was a problem-centred interview (Witzel, 2000), starting with a broadly pre-formulated question that generated storytelling, followed by further prompts and additional questions about topics that had not yet been raised.

Participants

The aim was to interview women who had either had sexual and/or romantic relationship experiences with more than one sex or gender, or

defined themselves as "bisexual" or as having another plurisexual identity. Recruitment began with women I knew via Vienna's queer community. Additional participants were recruited through snowball sampling, a commonly utilised recruitment method within sexualities research (Browne, 2005). Interviews took place in Vienna, either in bars or in private apartments. After the interview, the participants were asked to fill out a demographic questionnaire to identify participants' social characteristics, including their gender identity and sexual self-identifications. All participants had had sexual experiences; seven additionally had experienced long-term relationships with people of more than one sex or gender. The relationship experiences of these women could therefore be broadly described as bisexual. Sometimes "bisexual relationship experiences" is used as a short form to summarise their experiences. Of the nine women interviewed,² five identified as bisexual, two of whom also used the labels "queer" and "heterosexual". One self-defined as "ecosexual",³ one used her own concept of "genderblind" regarding sexual orientation, one defined herself as "heterosexual", and one gave no self-identification. At the time of the interviews, the women were aged between 19 and 54 (mean age = 34 years) and none of the participants had children. Eight were white (seven with an Austrian background and one identifying as an ethnic minority from Eastern Europe) and one was black. All were born in Austria, had been living in Vienna for several years, were well-educated, and described themselves as feminists.

Results

Different binegative concepts were identified throughout the analysis. In this chapter, however, I focus only on "unfaithfulness", as it proved to be the most pertinent and widely occurring theme in these women's narratives. I show how the participants positioned (their own) unfaithfulness in relation to their attractions to, and behaviours with more than one sex or gender (termed bisexuality), and the different strategies they applied to cope with (internalised) stigma. Additionally, I explore how female non-monogamous bisexuality can be theorised as linked to minority stress processes like (internalised) binegativity, expectations of rejection, and concealment of one's identity. The strategies the women adopted to cope with (internalised) binegativity, their reactions to allegations, and the actions that followed their own conclusions were particularly revealing. Therefore, the results report the different strategies the women adopted, ranging from negative self-conceptions to emancipation and agency. To depict the intricacy of the women's experiences, I chose to look for latent meanings in their narratives. In practice, I interpreted the underlying, internalised binegativity of statements and actions, taking into account the complex ways the women came to certain conclusions – for example, what other experiences of binegativity they had encountered. Thus, each extract will be discussed in light of additional information from the interviews.

Drawing negative conclusions about oneself: Jac

The first example focuses on one participant whose unfaithfulness is presented as something that happened, and that could be interpreted as internalised binegativity, which in turn contributes to the adoption of a binegative self-conception. Focusing on the negative conclusion Jac draws from her experiences and her coping strategy, I will discuss what her extract inherently tells us about her self-perception.

Jac is a 33-year-old woman. She had only had relationships with men until she “fell in love” with a woman, who she repeatedly referred to as her “big love”. The five-year relationship ended after Jac cheated on this partner with a man. Even though this break-up had occurred two years prior to the interview, she was still mourning the past relationship. Summarising her relationship experiences, Jac came to the following conclusion:

Jac: Because, unfortunately, I was always the person that cheated –

Renate: You said you cheated? I did not quite –

Jac: I cheated, yes. Well, that I had the feeling it is not what I want or it is too boring or I need – a kick or something and therefore, I think that I’m not really a relationship person.

Later on, Jac provided more information about her ex-girlfriend and what she thought about the relationship:

She prophesised that already from the beginning that I would do that [be unfaithful], because she didn’t believe that I am a lesbian [...] Well, she never bought it, – I think she bought it only way later how much I really love her, yeah. She just couldn’t understand why I thought she was great even if she is a woman [...] And she always said, ‘you will definitely cheat on me with a ... you will definitely cheat on me and it will for sure be with a man’.

At the beginning of the relationship, her female ex-partner struggled to accept that Jac could love her. She continuously repeated the prophecy that Jac would cheat on her with a man. After many years, the prophecy “came true” when Jac had a sexual encounter with a man outside of their assumed monogamous relationship. Consequently, her female partner broke up with Jac, who felt sorry and guilty, and did not dare to attend the queer-lesbian community they had both frequented. Multiple times during the interview, she expressed her remorse about what she had done. The above section shows Jac’s final conclusion. Generalising about her past (“always”) by using the exact wording of her ex-partner’s prophecy (“cheat”), she came to the conclusion, “Therefore, I think that I’m not really a relationship person”.

This short extract gives us several hints about Jac’s internalised binegativity, which can be understood when taking into account what happened before her

self-assessment of not being a relationship person. Before the act of unfaithfulness, there was: (a) the repeated vocalisation of an antibisexual stereotype (the prophecy), and years later; (b) the fulfilment of the actual unfaithfulness; Jac's reaction to the break-up was (c) to anticipate stigmatisation from the queer-lesbian community; (d) her withdrawal from this community and, finally; (e) the adoption of a binegative stereotype in her self-assessment.

Looking closer at each of these points, the following can be added. First, the repeatedly vocalised expectation that Jac would eventually cheat on her female partner with a man is a well-described prejudice by lesbians towards bisexual women (Ault, 1994; Lahti, 2015; Rust, 2003). Even the fact that the expectation becomes true can be interpreted within a bisexual context. Those bisexual people lacking role models who would otherwise give guidance to the unmasking of and dealing with stereotypes in a self-determined way are more vulnerable to fulfilling these stereotypes (Rust, 2003). Moreover, Jac's strategy of dealing with the breakup resembles a textbook example of a bisexual woman's bad breakup. Jac detailed how the queer-lesbian community of which she and her ex-partner used to be a part might have felt about her. While those who cheat may often be positioned as the villain by mutual friends and acquaintances, nonetheless it is clear that Jac clearly expected to be unwelcome specifically within this lesbian community after what she had done, which also lived up to stereotypes of bisexual people. Being afraid of stigmatisation by a lesbian community is a well-known stressor for bisexual people (Balsam & Mohr, 2007; Bostwick, 2012; Hayfield et al., 2014). In the end, the fear and guilt were so strong that she decided to withdraw from the queer-lesbian community, a state of affairs that had already lasted for two years at the time of the interview. Finally, Jac's negative assessment of her fitness for relationships ("therefore, I think that I'm not really a relationship person") can also be seen as the adoption of an internalised antibisexual stereotype: that bisexual people are not good at relationships in general (Klesse, 2011).

To sum up, when Jac instantiated a repeatedly vocalised stereotype from the lesbian community (the expectation of bisexual women cheating with men on their lesbian partner) and her relationship subsequently ended, her reaction was on two levels. First, she withdrew from the queer-lesbian community in anticipation of stigmatisation; second, she concluded that she was "not a relationship person", thereby self-applying the binegative stereotype of not being good at relationships. Thus, the notion of binegativity is not only expressed by members of the lesbian community, and by her female partner, but also by the bisexual woman herself. Therefore the negative constructions of bisexuality affect everyone involved.

Expectations of binegativity and rejection leading to concealment: Johanna

The next example depicts how antibisexual discourses around promiscuity may play into expectations of rejection because of one's identity and/

or sexual experience. Johanna had experienced relationships with different genders (including one trans woman) and was single at the time of the interview. She described her then-recent dating experience with a woman:

Also, I never told Julia that I date a man because I somehow have the feeling it would hurt her somehow double, because they have the feeling I only would have played with them and actually wanted a guy or I don't know what and then. It was consecutively like that, like, that I actually concealed the sex [of her partners] and maybe they had their own thoughts on that matter. However, up to today I really don't know what to do about it.

In the interview, Johanna added that this was the first time in her life that she had tried to date both men and women at the same time. She would have liked to be open about it. However, with women she was more reticent than with men. She expected women to be unaccepting of her openness to more than one sex or gender at the same time. She anticipated the binegative reaction that her date would assume she actually preferred men, which makes sense in a society where heterosexuality is seen as the default, compulsory, and naturalised sexuality (Butler, 1990). Johanna's reaction may have been intensified by the fact she was also considering non-monogamous relationships that fell outside of mononormativity and other normative relationship practices. A similar prejudice to the one that played out in Jac's case (the stereotype that bisexual women prefer men) is here expressed as anticipated binegativity. The main topic, however, is being afraid of rejection because of one's non-monogamous bisexual identity.

Johanna's case is a good example of the challenges that arise for someone with an identity at the intersection of bisexuality and non-monogamy, specifically during the start of an intimate relationship. She shows what Bostwick (2012, p. 8) calls "stigma consciousness". In the end, she chose the strategy of concealment. It is clear that she anticipated having to manage binegative attitudes. Her ambivalence about "coming out" is well attested to in the literature describing the struggles of bisexuals coming out in a society full of anti-bisexual discourses and practices (Balsam & Mohr, 2007; Flanders et al., 2016; Fra, 2014; Li et al., 2013). Furthermore, dealing with a twofold outing, as a bisexual and as a person preferring non-monogamous relationships, increases the challenges at the start of an intimate relationship in her experience.

Non-monogamy as strategy for emancipation: Kalypso and Asha

Not all the women understood bisexuality and non-monogamous practices as negative. The next two examples show how some women frame their experiences of unfaithfulness with greater agency. Similar to descriptions

by others, some women may embrace consensual non-monogamous or polyamorous relationship forms or identities as emancipatory possibilities (Gustavson, 2009; Klesse, 2005; Robinson, 2013). The next two examples exhibit a spectrum from challenging compulsory monogamy to claiming polyamory for oneself and adopting it as an inspiring relational identity.

Kalypso works in the arts; she has been in relationships with men and also had romantic and sexual encounters with women. In the following extract, she describes how important these encounters have been to her:

Something I didn't wanna miss. Anyway, I was in monogamous relationships and I just was unfaithful and I kept it to myself because I didn't want it to be destroyed. It was, it was selfish decisions that I took because I just wanted to give room to these women, well these encounters and I didn't want to accept why that shouldn't work out. And when I realised that, okay people are hurt, I thought, 'shit I don't want them to be hurt, that's not what it's all about'. So, I just don't tell them.

For Kalypso, non-consensual non-monogamy was a way for her to *live out* her sexuality. In the above extract, she expresses her conflicting thoughts of wanting to have sexual encounters with women while being in supposedly monogamous relationships with men at the same time as not wanting to "miss out" or hurt anyone. Considering her narration of other relationship experiences, a progression can be seen from non-consensual non-monogamous relationships in the past to a consensual, open, and honest relationship with her current partner. Similar to the women presented in studies by Li and colleagues (2013) and Robinson (2013), Kalypso thought of her bisexuality as the reason why she wanted to engage in an open relationship. The quoted passage shows that she does not blame herself as much as Jac does (Kalypso's "It was, it was selfish decisions that I took" versus Jac's "Because unfortunately, I was always the person that cheated"). Also, she did not draw negative conclusions about herself from her experiences. She only stated that she acted egotistically. However, she was pretty clear that she too wanted to have sexual/romantic encounters with women ("because I just wanted to give room to these women, well these encounters and I didn't want to accept why that shouldn't work out"). It is something she did not want to give up under any circumstances. In Kalypso's case, my interpretation did not find a link between internalised binegativity and unfaithfulness. This shows also how diverse the experiences (and subsequent interpretations) of the participants were and how problematic sweeping generalisations (e.g. in the form of stereotypes) about bisexual people are.

Asha is another example of a woman dealing with her sexuality in an emancipatory way. Her way of adopting polyamory as an inspiring concept for her identity and love life is one step further towards self-determined

agency. In the following extract, she discusses what discovering the concept of polyamory meant for her:

It was like a revelation when I realised I'm no arsehole. I'm no arsehole that always wants to play around. I am just in the wrong relationship concept, because I always thought there is just one. And that was such an *aha* experience for me; that was really cool.

Asha did not give us her personal conclusion on her sexual history as the previously mentioned women did. She just echoed the outside view of her ex-partners, who she told us did not have a positive opinion of her. It is not clear whether she ever thought them to be right about their assessment or whether it hurt her. The interesting part, however, is that she did not blame herself – feeling that she was a bad person – because she followed her sexual attractions. On the contrary, when she learned about the concept of polyamory from one of Vienna's bisexual support groups, it was “like a revelation” to her. She frames the concept of polyamory as something that she had always actually had inside herself; like other essentialised identities, it just needed to be revealed. I argue that in Asha's case, the adoption of a polyamorous identity is an act of empowerment. Others have also found that bisexual women adopt non-monogamous or polyamorous relationship concepts as an act of agency (Klesse, 2005; Robinson, 2013). Moreover, Asha was able to distance herself from the insults of others. Like Kalypso, in Asha's account there was seemingly no link between internalised binegativity and unfaithfulness that could be identified in the analysis. Thus, both examples provide evidence that women experiencing the emancipatory potential of non-monogamy are less likely to link bisexuality and unfaithfulness in a way that reflects internalised binegativity.

Discussion and conclusion

This work shows how bisexual women make meaning of unfaithfulness in relation to bisexuality. It adds to the current body of research on bisexual women by illustrating the complex interplay between (expected) unfaithfulness and different forms of binegativity (anticipated, internalised, or coming from others). It also provides evidence about how binegative accounts may reflect (internalised) binegativity. It explicitly portrays the conclusions the women draw for themselves and their surroundings, and their reactions and strategies based on their understandings of unfaithfulness and bisexuality: coming to the negative conclusion of not being “a relationship person” and emancipating oneself through non-consensual and consensual forms of non-monogamous relationships. Additionally, the following minority stress processes could be identified in bisexual non-monogamously living women: binegativity coming from others, being internalised or anticipated, expectation of rejection, and concealment of one's identity.

There are particular challenges in capturing different forms of internalised anti-bisexual attitudes that underlie the statements of the participants. From a superficial point of view one could jump to simple conclusions, such as that the extracts are accounts of the connection between promiscuity and bisexuality. However, this would over-simplify the complexity of bisexual lives. To show the intricacy of the women's experiences, I chose to look for latent meanings in their narratives, seeing the statements of the women in light of their actions, conclusions, and lived experiences. For the analysis, it proved to be helpful to have Meyer's (2003) framework of minority stress processes in mind. Looking at known stress processes such as discrimination (internalised binegativity or other people's negative attitudes), expectations of rejection, and concealment was crucial when taking into account the following points: (1) how the participants' understandings and positioning of unfaithfulness may not just highlight a reaction to one's own real or expected unfaithfulness; (2) how these understandings are connected to experienced or anticipated binegativity; and (3) how they are intertwined with internalised binegativity. In addition, the strategies the women adopted to cope with their internalised binegativity, their reactions to allegations, and the actions that followed their own conclusions were particularly revealing. The form the reactions took provided additional evidence, for example, regarding which ways binegativity has been internalised or challenged. The strategies of the women ranged from negative self-concepts to emancipation and agency. However, it is important to acknowledge the challenges in capturing internalised binegativity between the lines of the participants' narrations. Thus, the interpretation provided in the analysis is not the only possible one. Norms and attitudes surrounding (bisexual) women, their sexuality, and their relationships are manifold. Many parts of the interviews could also be interpreted as accounts of other norms around sexuality, sexual identity, and relationships such as compulsory monogamy and heteronormativity.

Predominant anti-bisexual attitudes presented here were that bisexual people are unfaithful and untrustworthy, and that their relationships are lacking in seriousness. These allegations are a result of the hypersexualisation of bisexual women, together with the idea that bisexual people can only be satisfied when engaging sexually/romantically with more than one sex or gender at the same time (Rust, 2003). Women failing to live in a monogamous way were in danger of falling into a complex array of anticipated stigmas and internalised binegative attitudes. However, choosing to live at the intersection of bisexuality and non-monogamy also proved to be challenging. Nevertheless, some women experienced non-monogamous relationship forms as empowering.

This work also shows how connected the challenges of bisexual identities and non-monogamously living people are when it comes to allegations of promiscuity. For some participants, non-monogamy proved to have an emancipatory potential, while others may have been inspired by

information explaining how active cultural forces around compulsory monogamy and couple-centrism shape the way we think about ourselves and our surroundings. Therefore, this work reiterates the call for activist synergies between bisexual and non-monogamous or polyamorous communities (Baumgartner, 2020; Klesse, 2011; Mint, 2004).

Some of the women in the current study talked about having sexual experiences while simultaneously being in relationships that were assumed by their partners to be monogamous. However, this occurrence of unfaithfulness is by no means generalizable to all bisexual or bisexually living women. There is generally little research on the infidelity of bisexual people (Hoang et al., 2011); similarly, few studies deal with the concept of “cheating” in consensual non-monogamous relationships (Wosick-Correa, 2010). For heterosexual women, it has been described that 50.6 per cent report they have cheated (Brand et al., 2007). So it seems safe to say that unfaithfulness is a widespread practice, irrespective of sexual orientation or relationship form (Leeker & Carlozzi, 2014).

Promiscuity allegations were often connected to the lesbian community, either anticipated by the participants or as vocalised allegations. Ault (1994) described the contentions of some members of lesbian and gay communities seeing bisexual people as traitors of their agenda and further expected them, in the long run, to choose a privileged heterosexual “lifestyle”. These allegations have to be contextualised within the wider web of power relations that regulate sexualities (Butler, 1990). In a society where heterosexuality is still the norm and homosexuality is the “other”, it is theorised that lesbian and gay communities have to distance themselves from the heterosexual mainstream and keep their communities free of possible intruders (Ault, 1996; Butler, 1990; Sedgwick, 1990). This proves to be especially challenging for bisexual people, who often find themselves positioned between the two communities (Borver, Gurevich, & Mathieson, 2001).

Different forms of discrimination – for example, stigmatisation, marginalisation, and internalised discrimination – can lead to psychological distress (Meyer, 2003). This has been described as especially impacting bisexual people, who experience double discrimination by both lesbian/gay communities and the heterosexual mainstream (Jorm et al., 2002; Ross et al., 2010). Thus, it is significant for therapists to have a full understanding of the complex psychological and social structures that influence the lives of bisexual people. Allegations of promiscuity and unfaithfulness are one of the most prominent aspects of binegativity; however, research on how bisexual women make meaning of bisexuality and unfaithfulness is scarce. Even if unfaithfulness should not be conflated with non-monogamous ways of living, publications on non-monogamy offer an interesting insight into the additional challenges and perks of being bisexual and non-monogamous. Work by Klesse (2005), Robinson (2013), and Gustavson (2009) describes the specific challenges of bisexual non-monogamous women, such as having

to deal with promiscuity discourses or being hypersexualised. It also shows that engaging in non-monogamous relationships acts as a form of agency for bisexual women. Some of the participants in these studies even described it as a “natural way of expressing their bisexuality” (Robinson, 2013, p. 28). Conversely, some bisexual people have been reported to see monogamous relationships as a way of resisting expectations that bisexual people will, by default, live non-monogamously (Gustavson, 2009; Robinson, 2013). Such research provides a vivid picture of the way bisexual people speak about (non-) monogamy. However, they do not take into account the complex interplay between bisexuality, (expected) unfaithfulness, and minority stress processes. The current chapter provides a complex analysis of this much discussed but under-researched topic on bisexual women.

The participants were all women and mostly well educated, feminists, and/or politicised. It would of course be interesting to find out about the experiences of bisexual people of other genders – for example, men and those who are trans, genderqueer, and/or non-binary. Additionally, it would be of special interest to adopt an intersectional approach to find out what role other social categories such as race/ethnicity, class, ability, and religion play in different forms of internalised discrimination. Future research could also focus on understanding other notions of internalised binegativity. In light of these findings, this chapter reinforces the importance of educating therapists about bisexual-specific issues and raising bisexual awareness within the LGBT+ community and society at large.

Notes

- 1 “—” Mid-statement pause; “(...)” pause, points correspond to pause length in seconds; “...” omitted text.
- 2 Regarding their gender identity, all the participants identified as “female”. One used “queer” to describe their gender identity.
- 3 The participant reported having been inspired by Annie Sprinkle and Beth Stephens, who coined *ecosexual* as “exploring the eroticism, romance, sensuality/sexuality of nature”.

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9 Plurisexuality and consensual non-monogamies

Challenging normativities in Italy

Nicole Braida

Introduction

Some studies suggest a relatively high percentage of consensual non-monogamous practices and/or relational preferences among bisexual people (Klesse, 2007; Page, 2004; Robinson, 2013). My study of theories and practices of consensual non-monogamy¹ in Italy confirms this. Indeed, among the 60 people I interviewed (who were not selected on the basis of sexual or romantic orientation), 27 defined themselves as plurisexual (24 as bisexual and/or pansexual, and three as heteroflexible). This number rises to 32 if we include those who defined themselves as “questioning” or did not use any label.

Bisexual identities have been marginalised for years within the LGBT movement in Italy. The main LGBT associations have contributed to this erasure, as has also happened in other countries (cf. Maliepaard, 2017). Only in recent years have local groups and associations emerged that are dedicated to bisexualities. Mondo Bisex: Coordinamento nazionale per la visibilità bisessuale (Bisex World: National Coordination for Bisexual Visibility) has been active since 2016, and was formed by activists from different local groups. In addition, the first Italian Bi+ Pride was held in Padua in 2017.

Italian politics displays a conservative attitude, especially in relation to family values and family structures, both of which are represented and strengthened by the country’s familialist welfare regime (Gusmano, 2018). Furthermore, the legislation that regulates partnering in Italy is shaped by heteronormativity and compulsory monogamy. Under 2016’s Cirinnà Law, marriage remains accessible exclusively to couples consisting of a woman and a man, while same-sex couples have access only to civil unions, and no recognition is provided outside of couple relationships. In this context, both plurisexuality and non-monogamies suffer from delegitimation and stigmatisation (Gusmano, 2018).

In this chapter I focus on the narratives of participants who identify as plurisexual. First, I describe a number of key concepts: binegativity, bi-erasure, compulsory monogamy, binormativity, and polynormativity.

I then present the methods used before discussing some of the participants' narratives regarding the intersection of bisexuality and consensual non-monogamous relational practices. Next, I highlight narratives around experiences of binegativity, experiences in LGBT spaces, and the roles of the polyamorous community. Finally, I use the concepts of binormativity and polynormativity to investigate the potential conflicts between the two identities/practices, and explore potential strategies to overcome these conflicts.

Theoretical definitions

Binegativity and bi-erasure

“Binegativity” refers to all negative beliefs or behaviours related to plurisexual orientations (Klesse, 2011). The term “biphobia” is used more often to convey the same meaning, but similarly to the term “homophobia”, it makes an explicit reference to fear (“phobia”). For this reason, contemporary scholarship on bisexualities prefers the term “binegativity” because it is more neutral regarding the origins of the attitude (cf. Baumgartner, 2017). One of the ways in which binegativity is expressed is through the reinforcement and reproduction of negative stereotypes associated with plurisexual orientations, such as the depiction of plurisexual people as unreliable, necessarily unfaithful, spreaders of sexually transmitted infections, unstable, and/or confused (Baumgartner, 2017; Eisner, 2013; Ochs, 1996).

Another specific form of binegativity is bi-erasure, which can be defined as the set of behaviours that help to obscure the visibility or question the validity of plurisexual orientations – for example, by assimilating them into either homosexuality or heterosexuality, or by seeing them as a phase or a fashion (Eisner, 2013). Living in a social context where binegative attitudes are pervasive, plurisexual people often internalise these attitudes. People who have internalised binegativity are inclined to interpret their own sexual-romantic orientations and sexual and/or romantic behaviours through the lens of binegativity (Baumgartner, 2017; Meyer, 2003; Ochs, 1996).

Compulsory monogamy

Toft and Yip (2018, p. 245) define compulsory monogamy as “the dominant aspirational norm that underpins the popular construction of ‘committed’ and ‘faithful’ intimate relationships”. As the two authors highlight, compulsory monogamy, in association with “compulsory coupledness” (Wilkinson, 2013), continues to define the norm for intimate relationships that can be considered “‘authentic’, ‘committed’, and ‘fulfilling’” (Toft and Yip, 2018, p. 235). In conjunction with heteronormativity, this gives rise to a variety of cultural, institutional, and legal mechanisms that prioritise a very specific

relational form over others: a sustainable and exclusive sexual and affective relationship between two individuals, preferably consisting of a man and a woman. Same-sex relationships have recently received greater recognition, but they still need to demonstrate this exclusive and sustainable character (cf. Gustavson, 2009).

Binormativity and polynormativity

People who are both plurisexual and non-monogamous also have to face specific difficulties that can arise from the intersection of the two identities/practices. The analysis presented in this chapter is influenced by the perspective of intersectionality, which highlights the need to consider the intersections between different axes of oppression (cf. Cooper, 2016). In this case, the focus is on the axes of sexual orientation and relational practices; I have made a conscious choice to set aside other axes in this chapter. This focus on sexual orientation and relational practices was also used by Gusmano (2018) in her article on the coming out of bisexual and polyamorous people in Italy. Here I highlight binormativity and polynormativity, as these are the core concepts through which to analyse potential conflicts between the two communities.

Binormativity can be defined as “the normalisation of a certain standard of bisexuality against which all other forms of bisexuality are measured” (Del Castillo, 2015, p. 10). This phenomenon refers to the strategy, largely adopted by the mainstream bisexual movement, of rejecting the commonest stereotypes of bisexuality with what Eisner (2013, p. 40) calls the “‘that’s not true!’ formula”. For example, in response to the stereotype that portrays bisexual people as “slutty, promiscuous or inherently unfaithful” (Eisner, 2013, p. 41), the mainstream bisexual movement often highlights bisexual people’s success in maintaining happy, exclusive relationships for a long time, and rejects the equation between bisexuality and sexual promiscuity. While this may absolutely be true for a number of bisexual people, this “defence” of bisexuality also risks imprisoning the image of the bisexual within a standard of the “normal” and “good” bisexual, thereby excluding all the bisexual people who do not fit that standard (Eisner, 2013; see also Gurevich et al., 2007; Maliepaard, 2017).

An analogous phenomenon within the polyamorous community is “polynormativity”, defined as “any discourse defending polyamory as the right, best, or superior way of intimate relating” (Ferrer, 2018, p. 11). The main strategy behind this representation, both in the media and in polyamorous groups, consists of distancing oneself from other forms of non-monogamy, especially those that focus on sexual experimentation and promiscuity (casual sex, swinging) or are not “ethical” (infidelity). Instead, the focus is placed on what Wilkinson (2010) calls “polyromanticism”, that is, a narrative of polyamory centred on love and intimacy.

Methods

My theoretical approach is influenced by critical theory and constructionist research (cf. Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Proponents of critical theory see research as a tool for social change, and they aim to give a voice to people who are excluded from dominant discourses (cf. Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Keso, Lehtimäki, & Pietiläinen, 2009). The main research purpose of constructionists is to present alternative interpretations of reality, constantly trying to question the taken-for-granted, and making visible the structures and dynamics of power (Keso et al., 2009).

My research, which I carried out as part of my three-year doctoral project (October 2016 to September 2019), took a mostly inductive approach and relied on an insider perspective, since I had already been familiar with the Italian polyamorous network for around five years.

Participants

The 32 plurisexual people in my sub-sample were aged between 23 and 51 at the time of the interview. They were all Italian and white, and they were mostly middle or higher educated (all had at least secondary education, more than two-thirds had tertiary education). Regarding their gender identities, eight participants were non-binary – that is, they did not identify as either men or women – 18 were women, and six were men. There was quite a variety in their understandings of romantic orientation: 19 identified as polyamorous; one person used two terms, “polyamorous” and “ethical non-monogamous”; another person reported oscillating between “polyamory” and “relationship anarchy”²; another respondent preferred to say that she had decided to have polyamorous relationships but refused the polyamorous identity; five identified as relationship anarchists; one used either “relationship anarchist” or “polyamorous”, depending on to whom he was speaking; three people preferred to use more generic terms, such as “non-monogamous”; and finally, one person preferred not to define her relational orientation in any way other than “queer”.

Recruitment strategies

The criteria for recruitment were that interview participants should have had at least two relationships at the same time for at least six months with the knowledge and consent of all the people involved.

I tried to recruit people from both inside and outside the polyamorous community. Recruitment inside the community followed two strategies: (1) online, through calls for participants circulated in local polyamorous groups, and by directly contacting people who had ideas or experiences that I considered useful to diversify my sample; and (2) in person, during participation in local meetings.

To reach people who were not insiders of the polyamorous community, I activated my informal networks in communities that had some intersections with the polyamorous community, such as queer spaces, kinky/BDSM/sex-positive communities, and LGBT+ groups. Finally, I also used snowball sampling to recruit people from different networks.

Instruments and analysis

Although I also used other methods in my doctoral research (the analysis of online discourses, and participant observation), in this chapter I limit the discussion to the results of the interviews.

I officially began the fieldwork in October 2017 and finished it in July 2018. I conducted observant participation and/or interviews in ten cities/regions: Turin, Rome, Bologna, Padua, Florence/Tuscany, Milan, Genoa, Sardinia, Naples, and Palermo. The interviews were semi-structured, conducted in person by me, and audio-recorded. In all cases I asked the interviewees to choose a place that was comfortable for them and not too noisy. Most of the interviews were conducted in cafes or private homes. They lasted between 40 and 150 minutes, but most were around 90 minutes in duration. All the interviews were transcribed verbatim before analysis. I used Dedoose data analysis software to code the interview data. I organised the analysis of the material using codes and subcodes, then I analysed each code separately with the help of schemes and conceptual maps, which were followed by further schematisations. All names are pseudonyms.

Results

Plurisexuality and consensual non-monogamies: Blurring boundaries

Since one of the most persistent stereotypes about bisexuality revolves around the notion that bisexual people must have relationships with more than one sex or gender to feel complete and satisfied (Rust, 2003), one might expect it to have been the plurisexual orientation of my interviewees that had led them to non-monogamy. On the contrary, though, just three of my interviewees reported a narrative that approached this pattern. For example, Marta (42, pansexual cis woman) thought that her orientation had facilitated non-monogamous living from the beginning of the relationship: “I felt bisexual and I said this immediately, and therefore this already opened up the discussion a little in the couple”.

Instead, there were far more narratives that presented the exploration of plurisexuality as running parallel with the exploration of consensual non-monogamy, or presented the exploration of non-monogamy as an incentive for the exploration of plurisexuality. For two people, Guido and Pau, the exploration of plurisexuality had gone hand in hand with the exploration not only of consensual non-monogamy, but also of gender identity.

I consider [the discovery of polyamory] a milestone in my life, that is: There is really a before and an after. If I saw my wardrobe as it was before and as it is after, that is ...³ Later, in a month, I questioned everything: gender identity, relationship, aaaand ... sexual orient ... – better, sexual, I had never formalised it but it had never been a problem for me to think that I could like men sexually – affectively I had never ... evaluated, I had never reasoned about it.

(Guido, 30, pansexual genderfluid)

In Guido's narrative, the discovery of polyamory clearly divided their life in two. They highlighted how their life had changed completely, questioning not only their relationship preferences but also their gender identity (previously, they had never questioned their male identity, but now they realised they were genderfluid), their gender performance (they changed their wardrobe), and their sexual and in particular affective orientation (from heterosexual to pansexual).

Pau said:

Meanwhile I understand, in that period then, to be attracted also to men, but I experiment sexually with women, with which I am, in a series of ways, helped a lot, precisely, by [a] bisexual and polyamorous girl, whoooo makes me experiment with a whole series of sexual modalities, [...] a whole series of ... cross-dressing, and ... ooof ... role play, experimentation, which I had only sketched before.

(Pau, 25, pansexual non-cis)

In Pau's narrative, her polyamorous experience opened the way for her first to question her sexual orientation and then to question her gender identity. At the time of the interview, she identified simply as "non-cis", but later she began to use female pronouns and started her transition.

If we turn now to the group of people who read their own discovery of consensual non-monogamy as antecedent to their exploration of plurisexuality, Amedeo told me that the experience of consensual non-monogamy had led him also to question his romantic orientation. In particular, through polyamorous experiences, he realised he could love men too:

The wonderful thing is that there has never been anything [sexual] between me and that boy [...] but I have discovered that I love him. And it was very nice, it was a shock, no one had ever told me that you could love someone like that.

(Amedeo, 35, questioning cis man)

In this regard, even Filippo – who continued to call himself homosexual, and for this reason is not included in the subsample – told me that the experience

of polyamory had been so intense that it had led him to consider having an emotional relationship with a woman for the first time:

First, yes, maybe it happened to me to make out with a girl, but I wouldn't have thought of establishing a relationship with a girl, because I followed this prevailing stream, so my declared homosexuality meant that I ... had a lot of male sexual partners.

(Filippo, 48, gay cis man)

These findings mirror a more general attitude among many of our participants. Indeed, with their discovery of consensual non-monogamies, many respondents emphasised a passage from definitions that were rigid and had solid boundaries to definitions that were more nuanced, pluralised, and multifaceted. These narratives concerned not only sexual and romantic orientations, but also the distinction between significant and non-significant relationships, the definition of love, and in some cases also gender identities. They can be read as “postmodern stories” (cf. Plummer, 1995), because they move towards the abandonment of a “linear, one-dimensional” and universal model to embrace a more nuanced, complex, and context-specific idea of progress (Simon, 1996, p. 25). Above all, these participants began to question dichotomies such as heterosexual/homosexual, love/not love, and man/woman (cf. Ochs, 1996).

Experiences of binegativity

People who are both plurisexual and non-monogamous face specific negativities due to their position in between conditions that are seen as opposite and mutually exclusive in mainstream discourse, such as homosexual/heterosexual or radical/mainstream (Gusmano, 2018; Rambukkana, 2004). In Rambukkana's (2004, p. 144) words, their “social mantles” have a “liminal nature”. In this position, labels and definitions can be perceived as a strategy to reaffirm oneself, but not necessarily in fixed or immutable ways (cf. Robinson, 2013).

Manuel started from an episode where a stranger accused him of “defining too much” to reaffirm the importance of self-definition as a tool of empowerment against trans- and binegativity:

The person who approached me [...] said: ‘Well, [...] you are a person who defines himself so much [...], you can't feel good if you define yourself so much, you are one who does not let go.’ And there, really, it was the first time I imposed, I really put my identity, my wall in front of someone, saying: ‘I decide for myself, because in my experience I realised that if I don't do it, the other thousand relationships do it in my place’. It could be a big thing like [my former partner], that then, out

of the couple, the game, the sadomasochism, aaand ... a thousand other things and practices [...] he tells me: ‘Oh well, you’re sick’, or it could be, later, in a relationship with a very serene person, when speaking of my sexuality, they say: ‘You believe you are bisexual’, that is, that hint ... it resonated with me as: ‘Until proven otherwise’, which is something that has fucking annoyed me since I developed, basically.

(Manuel, 32, bisexual non-binary trans man)

Other respondents revealed a hesitance about calling themselves bisexual out of the fear that they lacked experience or that their attraction to different genders was too unbalanced. For example, Serena (28, heteroflexible cis woman) had four male partners at the time of the interview, but she also had a “special friendship” with a girl with whom she had had sexual interactions and had also lived for a period; yet this seemed to her not to be “enough” for her to be called “truly bisexual”. This feeling of inadequacy is a sign of the internalisation of a definition of bisexuality that envisages an equal degree of romantic and sexual attraction to men and women as a necessary condition (cf. Maliepaard, 2017).

However, since the 1990s a more inclusive definition of bisexuality has spread among bisexual movements, both with respect to non-binary identities and with regard to the possibility of experimenting with different degrees and modes of attraction to different genders (e.g. Ochs & Rowley, 2009). As Eisner (2013, pp. 21–22) points out, the strength of this definition “is in the way it enables anyone who wants to identify as bisexual to do so (In other words, it reassures people)”.

In my view, another effect of bi-erasure (understood as the tendency to ignore, falsify, or minimise the existence of bisexuality) is that plurisexual people who are in relationships with people of a different gender are read as heterosexual by society (cf. Gusmano, 2018; McLean, 2008) because bisexuality is normally not considered as a hypothesis. This effect is also due to the tendency of Western societies to organise the world into dichotomies (Klesse, 2005). In this regard, Attilio remarked on the importance of coming out in a situation of social invisibility:

If the occasion happens I say it, also because, being ... pan, but having currently only relationships with women, that is I become ... invisible. So, I mean, I really want to say it.

(Attilio, 42, pansexual cis man)

Some of the participants in Robinson’s (2013) study suffered similar frustration about passing as straight because they were in a relationship with a man. This is a wider problem for plurisexual identities that makes plurisexual people feel they must constantly reaffirm their sexuality through their behaviour (cf. Klesse, 2007).

Experiences in LGBT spaces

Binegativity in LGBT spaces is a well-known problem within bisexual studies (e.g. Ault, 1994; Baumgartner, 2017), which can have repercussions for plurisexual people's ability to engage in relationships and for their relational wellbeing in general, due to the stereotype that bisexual people are not reliable partners (see Baumgartner, 2017; Klesse, 2011). Some people in my subsample had experienced binegativity that aimed to invalidate and erase their orientation:

The unique problems I had with regard to the relationship discourse are ... stories of rather heavy bullying by lesbians who told me: 'Because you didn't find anybody who licks you well', aaaaand ... [this] with my girlfriend at my side ... [giggle] [...], and then by a girl who was part of [a famous Italian LGBT association] that told me I'm sick.

(Emilia, 30, bisexual cis woman)

The episode reported by Emilia was particularly emotionally violent, because the person with whom she was interacting not only questioned her orientation but also attributed the cause of her non-conversion to lesbianism to her partner's lack of sexual skill, in her partner's presence.

I will always remember the first time I arrived [at a self-help group for gay men] [...] When you have to do the presentation, I said: 'Well, I'm Valerio, blah blah blah ... I'm bisexual', and the coordinator told me: 'Quiet, that is ... is a phase, it does not exist!' ... and I thought: 'Fuck, I come here ...' that is, now, it was not so ... it was more important to be accepted as gay, so I said: 'Okay, if he says that it doesn't exist ...'

(Valerio, 42, bisexual cis man)

In Valerio's case, the invalidation of his orientation came from the coordinator of the gay self-help group he was attending, and this led to his internalisation of the bi-erasure; he reclaimed his self-definition as bisexual only 15 years later.

Roles of the polyamorous community

Some people emphasised the important role of the polyamorous community, which provided a space in which to encounter and experiment with practices outside heteronormativity, compulsory monogamy, and cisnormativity. For example, Irene told me:

I remember that it was in July that I went to the first meeting with the polyamorous community, which was kind of overwhelming, very long,

we met at five and we came home at five in the morning, we went to the sea, we made a bonfire. [...] *I had never seen so many bisexual people before* and I was also very happy there.

(Irene, 32, bisexual cis woman; my italics)

For Guido, too, the community represented a safe space in which to explore their identity:

In the community I found some friends, some real friends, I found the community very cool because [...] the people I found were part of the process of feeling myself in the possibility of being ... who I want, therefore also the possibility of being in a space [...] in which to prove to be a different person: The first time I wore a dress was here, the first time I said it openly to a person who was not in the group was here, I feel safer here too, because they know me, because they have always seen me ... it's a safe space for me.

(Guido, 30, pansexual genderfluid)

These findings confirm the importance of involvement in non-normative communities (Gusmano, 2018). Monro (2015) recognises this as a function of bisexual communities too. Three people within my subsample were bisexual activists, but neither they nor any of the other participants mentioned the bisexual community as having this specific function. This absence can be traced back to the fact that my interviews were focusing on the polyamorous community, but I also hypothesise that in the absence of a strong and deep-rooted bisexual community, some plurisexual people found the polyamorous community to be a place where they could express themselves (cf. Gusmano, 2018).

However, not all the interviewees perceived the polyamorous community as strongly bisexual:

Marta: In the poly community [...] there isn't much ... flexibility, I think ... at least in the group in [city] ...

Nicole: Mm ... flexibility, you say ... er ... bisexual people, or ...?

Marta: Bisexual people. I don't ... there don't seem to be many. I mean, they do it at the level of ... erotic games, right? [...] In short, maybe at sex parties, but always oriented within their relationships with their [male] partners ... always in that perspective there, that sincerely, to me ... I don't care. I take it individually.

(Marta, 42, pansexual cis woman)

Unlike Irene, Marta did not seem to have found many bisexual people within the polyamorous community. On closer inspection, however, her judgement about women in the community who called themselves bisexual may have

been the effect of internalised bi-erasure that led her to consider only a restricted category of people/behaviours as “truly bisexual” (cf. Maliepaard, 2017). Indeed, she thought that these women’s bisexual performance was a function of the male gaze (cf. Maliepaard, 2017; Monro, 2015).

Challenging polynormativity and binormativity

The intersection between plurisexuality and non-monogamies represents a challenge to both monosexism and compulsory monogamy, precisely because these two identities (and/or the practices they refer to) are perceived as threatening to the social order (Cruz, 2014; Gusmano, 2018; Mint, 2004). This section discusses the challenges that this intersection also represents with respect to binormativity and to polynormativity.

Both bisexual and polyamorous communities seem to prioritise love discourses over sex discourses to make bisexuality and non-monogamy more acceptable to mainstream society. This tendency to exclude the most “unpresentable” actors from sexual minority communities can be connected to the functioning of what Rubin (1992) calls the “sexual hierarchy”. According to the dominant sexual hierarchy in Western societies, the sexualities considered “‘good’, ‘normal’ and ‘natural’” are “heterosexual, marital, monogamous, reproductive, and non-commercial” (Rubin, 1992, p. 152). All other sexualities are considered “‘bad’, ‘abnormal’, or ‘unnatural’” (1992, p. 152). This hierarchy generates struggles between different groups based on “how to draw the line” (Rubin, 1992, p. 152) between good and bad sexualities. This is the reason why contemporary mainstream LGBT activism struggles to cleanse its image of allegations of promiscuity, perversion, infidelity, and commercial sex. Polynormativity and binormativity seem to follow the same mechanism: They are both defensive strategies that aim for the normalisation of polyamorous and bisexual people respectively.

Some of my interviewees also insisted on establishing a distance between polyamory and infidelity, or from other consensual non-monogamies such as swinging and casual sex. For example, Eleonora (32) and Gabriele (27) told me that they had not enjoyed a polyamorous event organised by the small local community because “true polyamorous could be counted on the fingers of one hand”, implying that all the other people had been adulterers or swingers. These two participants reiterated several times during the interview that their love was “true love”.

Looking at the intersection of plurisexual and non-monogamous identities (and/or practices) from a radical point of view means looking for the transformative potential of this intersection. In affirming this I do not mean that all plurisexual and non-monogamous people are subversive and revolutionary, but I intend to accept Eisner’s (2013) suggestion that we take advantage of the threatening potential that bisexuality and non-monogamy represent to stimulate social change.

Manuel's account of his own path towards self-determination is useful to deepen this reflection:

My great gripe was ... when I fell in love with someone, to convince him that I wasn't ... a slut [...], I had to enter the position of having to prove my love, to demonstrate ... to deny my past and even, at some point, to deny stereotypes, such as a bisexual person cannot be monogamous. So, I was fighting against this stereotype, until at some point I said to myself: 'But do you know what it is? True, a bisexual person can be monogamous, but that's not my case'. [We laugh.] And, therefore, I don't know, I saw it as a moment of great liberation. [...] Then, when I later declared myself a slut, eager, an intellectual snob and so ... like maybe the first relationship I had after this moment, saying: 'I feel balanced, and I feel that my gender dysphoria right now – then who knows? – is appeased by the fact of being with [a female partner and a male partner]'.

(Manuel, 32, bisexual non-binary trans man)

Manuel reflects on how he first tried to conform to binormative expectations, denying that he was promiscuous and non-monogamous, and denying that he needed a man and a woman at the same time. But then he realised that in that specific phase of life he had attained balance by dating a woman and a man at the same time, and that this was his personal experience, and therefore valid and worthy.

However, it is also important to highlight that publicly assuming identities that challenge the dominant order is not a position that is accessible to everyone, especially in some spheres of life such as the work environment (where, in fact, most of my respondents were not out). Popova (2018) found that bisexuality could remain silent and invisible – and therefore acceptable – in a workplace context until it touched on the sphere of identity. On the other hand, when it was accompanied by a polyamorous practice, bisexuality fell out of the ranks of respectability and was more difficult to encompass within institutional structures.

Coming out is also difficult for people who live with their parents – a not uncommon situation in Italy, where precarious working conditions are accompanied by a familialist welfare regime (cf. Gusmano, 2018).

Discussion and concluding remarks

My exploration of theories and practices of consensual non-monogamy in Italy confirms that there is a strong interconnection between plurisexualities and consensual non-monogamous practices. For many of my participants, the two identities or practices went hand in hand, and for some people polyamorous theories and practices were an incentive to explore plurisexualities too. Above all, this intersection seems to stimulate the overcoming of

rigid and mutually exclusive dichotomies (especially homosexual/heterosexual, woman/man, and love/not love). For some people (although not for everyone), the polyamorous community represented a safe space in which to experiment with both. The lack of evidence of a bisexual community here highlights that, at the time of the interviews, my participants did not perceive the bisexual community in Italy as a concrete and traversable space (for example, support and discussion groups for bisexual people were currently present in very few cities).

Outside these protected areas, the intersection of the two identities/practices often gives rise to the amplification of stigma, which is particularly hard to manage for the most vulnerable subjects, and which applies even in LGBT spaces. It is important, however, to grasp and highlight the transformative and subversive potential of this intersection. Indeed, it also contains the potential to challenge some of the defensive strategies of the reference communities themselves, particularly those that tend towards normalisation and victimisation. The figures of the “good homosexual” (Klesse, 2007, p. 12), the “good polyamorous” (cf. Ferrer, 2018; Ritchie, 2010), or the “good bisexual” (Eisner, 2013, p. 43) remove stigma only from those who adapt to the status quo, but they weaken the transformative power of struggles, strengthening dominant mononormative and heteronormative narratives (cf. Klesse, 2006, 2016).

Hopefully, the unveiling of the conflicts and drawbacks of these strategies may inspire the different communities to move towards convergence. In this sense, one of the common aims may be the reappropriation and affirmation of diversity through conflict with different types of normativity.

Notes

- 1 My project began with a strong focus on polyamorous theories, practices, and communities. Nevertheless, I prefer to use this more inclusive term, since many of my participants did not identify as polyamorous, and some (especially those who identified as relationship anarchists) criticised the polyamorous approach because in their opinion it did not question the hierarchy between romantic and non-romantic relationships.
- 2 Relationship anarchy can be defined as the practice of forming relationships that are not bound by rules other than those mutually agreed by the people involved. It differs from polyamory because it is more radically non-hierarchical and refuses to apply labels to relationships, such as “just friends”, “in a relationship”, and so on (cf. Anapol, 2010).
- 3 In the interview extracts, “...” indicates a break in speech, while “[...]” indicates a deletion from the original transcript.

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Part III

Bi+ identities



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10 Forms of bisexual injustice

Bi, being, and becoming a knower

Robin Rose Breetveld

Introduction: The knowledgeable bisexual

Before we delve into a discussion of knowledge and power, and their implications for bisexual identity, we need to address why it is important to have this discussion. In order to unpack the marginalisation faced by bisexuality within scholarship and knowledge production, it is important to acknowledge that bisexuals are indeed a marginalised group. This marginalisation is manifested not only through people and their lived experiences, but also within the academic setting. Nevertheless, bisexuality scholarship has taken great strides towards an autonomous position not only within LGBT and queer studies, but also in mainstream studies and social theory (Maliepaard, 2018b). Disseminating knowledge about bisexuality will not only inform professionals and scholars about this disparity, but will in turn also reach those who need it most: bisexual individuals who are dealing with discrimination, ignorance, and binegativity (Eliason, 1997). This will allow bisexuals to feel supported by the availability of knowledge, and to feel validated in the legitimacy of their experiences.

This chapter will lead you from the Foucauldian deconstruction of Western sexuality to an understanding of the epistemic position of bisexuality within the conceptualisation of sex, desire, sexuality, and identity. The chapter will cover the medicalisation of sex, bisexual discourse, the critique of current sexual scholarship, the multiplicity of bisexual identity, its complex position within identity politics, and the tools of bisexual erasure. There is a vast body of work on epistemology (theories focused on the way knowledge is perceived and produced), and I aim to lay down a preliminary foundation to help provide an understanding of how bisexuality is positioned within knowledge production. I hereby urge you to read this chapter as a first glimpse into the complex nature of bisexuality's epistemological role – both within the social sciences and in more personal interrelational contexts. This is in order to tantalise you to continue reading, as *to know* is one thing, but understanding *why we know* or *do not know* is equally important.

The invention of sexual identity

The human desire to strive for knowledge is one of the cornerstones of who we are as a species, and is crucial to the way we make sense of life and living. There is an easy connection to be established between what we deem to be knowledge and our understanding of what might be considered “the truth”. Moreover, various important epistemologies have shown us that the conception that there is a singular truth is highly contested. The epistemologies in question are those of philosophy, ethics, and phenomenology. Phenomenology is the study of the things (phenomena) we experience, and how these phenomena are intersubjectively constructed (Heidegger, 1962; Husserl, 1963). Phenomenology provides insight into how the *production* of knowledge – which is distinctly different from knowledge itself – revolves around power. To have hegemonic power is to hold the dominant position within a group of concepts, thoughts, and ideas. This position is so dominant in fact that when one interacts with that set of ideas, one will have the tendency to think and act through this dominant stance before any other. This makes hegemonic power a pervasive force throughout all aspects of life: the social, the political, the material, and particularly identity. In response to the experience of second-class citizenship compared with those in hegemonic positions in Western society (the cisgendered, the heterosexual, the white, the middle class), feminist, queer, and racial epistemologies have focused on developing understandings of how these hegemonic powers produce knowledge. This is achieved by critiquing the literary canon for its marginalising practices: observing how and why dominant powers obscure the production of knowledge by those who fall outside the hegemonic position (Ahmed, 2006; Foucault, 1978; Sedgwick, 1991). Moreover, these epistemologies resist their marginalised position as “invalid” subjects, and aim to produce knowledge – both autonomous and intersecting – from gendered, queered, and racial/non-Western perspectives. These epistemologies have given us the understanding that neither knowledge nor “truth” is a one-size-fits-all concept, but instead they both rely heavily on the ways in which they are constructed.

Regarding the construction of knowledge about sexuality, we should take a step back and look at the foundations of the epistemologies of the marginalised. The French poststructuralist Michel Foucault (1926–84) deconstructed the Western view of sex and sexuality in *The History of Sexuality* (1978), in which he laid the theoretical foundations for contemporary sexual scholarship. Through this deconstruction, Foucault offered a new perspective (not only on sexuality, but on power and “singular truth”) by creating a historical narrative around the construction of the homosexual *identity* – separating it from same-sex sexual practice and rejecting the idea that sexuality is an innate, static human condition (Foucault, 1978; Weeks, 2017). Foucault’s (1978) deconstruction shows history as a narrative, a story for us to pinpoint where the desire to make sense of sex and sexuality

became discursively problematic. Through the act of classification, certain sexual acts became problems in need of correction, and subsequently became regulated by those in hegemonic positions of power. Due to the medicalisation of sex during the Victorian era, and the rise of psychoanalysis in the early twentieth century, Western society started to define sexual identities (Foucault, 1978). With the rise of sexology, sex became a science – and with medicalisation comes inherent *pathology*. In Victorian times, procreation mattered more than pleasure, and sexual freedom (heterosexual or otherwise) became repressed, resented, and rejected. According to Foucault (1978), anything that transgressed procreational sex required management through oppressive power (exercised by and through institutions such as religion, state, and family). Thus, through the creation of the discourse that surrounds heterosexual procreative sex, combined with the pathologisation of transgressive (non-procreational) sex, the social stigmatisation of “sexual deviancy” emerged within society (Callis, 2009; Foucault, 1978; Weeks, 2017). This was the moment in Western history when sexual identities emerged and became embedded within culture and society:

The nineteenth century homosexual became a personage, a past, a case history, and a childhood, in addition to being a type of life, a life-form, and a morphology, with an indiscreet anatomy and possibly a mysterious physiology. Nothing that went into his total composition was unaffected by his sexuality [...] The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species.

(Foucault, 1978, p. 43)

This management of sexuality, and the rise of heterosexual and homosexual identities, meant that society was now structured around sexual normativity. Here we see the pillars of binary thinking come to life within discourse, and ultimately in the way we are conditioned to think about sexuality.

Bisexuality and discourse

If we shift the Foucauldian analysis of sexual normativity towards bisexuality, a historical perspective also indicates the construction that led to the problematisation of this identity. To define something (in this case, sexuality) is to problematise the undefined (bisexuality): once the undefined is considered a deviation (neither straight *nor* gay), regulation must occur to uphold the power of that which *is* defined (heterosexuality *and* homosexuality). Neither psychoanalysis nor sexology defined bisexuality as a sexual identity in the early twentieth century, but instead saw it as the biological gateway to normative sexual attraction and normative sex (Callis, 2009). From this perspective, the focus regarding bisexuality lay on biological hermaphroditism: the foetus starts from an intersex disposition before becoming male or female, so therefore it is also bisexual before becoming

heterosexual or homosexual (Angelides, 2001; Ellis, 1915; Freud, 1962). Callis (2009) states that because bisexuality was not classified autonomously in sexology and psychoanalysis, bisexuals were never considered “a species”, nor was there any “truth” to be found within bisexual identities. Therefore, not only did bisexuality escape medicalisation, but this simultaneously led to a void in the development of bisexuality as an identity, accompanied with the potential for discursive denial – the understanding that bisexuality simply does not exist (Hemmings, 1995, 2002).

Foucault’s (1978) *The History of Sexuality* shows that both sexual identity and its regulation are socially shaped through societal structures, as same-gendered sexual practice was around long before it was deemed to be “homosexual”. Moreover, scholars such as Callis (2009) note through Foucauldian analysis that same-sex sexual acts are not performed exclusively by homosexuals – even if one cannot “prove the truth” of bisexuality through a binary “either/or” understanding of homosexual and heterosexual sex. This either/or thinking equally leads to the further ontological erasure of bisexuality through discursive attempts to “consolidate discrete lesbian and gay identities” (Monro, 2015, p. 26). The lack of “truth and proof” of bisexual identities within this normative construction leaves a deafening silence. However, silence is a powerful tool in its own right: “There is not one but many silences, and they are an integral part of the strategies that underlie and permeate discourses” (Foucault, 1978, p. 27; see also Fricker, 2007). As with performative speech acts, there is an equally performative element to the act of silence: there is tremendous weight in that “which is not said”, and to be situated outside of discourse can therefore be a method of playing out power relations. These power struggles occur in spheres where discourse is both produced and maintained (from wider society to academia) (see Elia, Eliason, & Beemyn, 2018; Monro, Hines, & Osborne, 2017). These spheres interact strongly with one another, and have similar mechanisms for silencing marginalised sexualities.

We can start to see that discourse is always not-neutral and not necessarily ethically sound, as its production relies on power and context (Foucault, 1978). Discourse has the ability to develop and maintain privilege, and equally, the ability to inflict serious harm on those living through discursive discrimination, discursive silence, and subsequent marginalisation. A core assumption of phenomenology is that there is an evident connection between discourse, knowledge, and experience, none of which can be produced without affecting the others. This is evident in intimate narratives of sexuality, identity, and culture, as they are lived experiences – the emotional and physical embodiments of a social reality (Plummer, 1995). Knowledge and discourse shape social realities, which in turn shape experiences, which subsequently shape identity. So if the production of knowledge (by social researchers) revolves around experience, we are confronted with a multitude of potential issues – not only epistemological, but also ethical. Questions arise such as: Who is allowed to produce knowledge? Who is allowed to

disseminate it? And who is allowed to have a voice? Moreover, this leads us to wonder what potential injustice the answers to these questions might bring to light.

Howard Becker's (1967) article "Whose Side are We On?" highlights the role social scientists (and sociologists in particular) play in the production of knowledge, and the complex ethical issues that can come with this position. The article actively engages in a request for academia to take a reflexive stance on knowledge production. Becker asks whether the academic tries to disseminate other people's knowledge (or perhaps other knowledge) into the world for altruistic reasons (e.g. "it is the right thing to do") or for more selfish reasons (e.g. for career advancement under the weight of academia's "publish or perish" culture). Moreover, he questions the academic's position in keeping these hierarchies of knowledge in place, specifically regarding the power to provide someone with a voice – using the platform of academia to generate further discourse. Plummer (1995) refers to the narrative power of sexual experiences, and how remaining silent about these experiences (such as being closeted, or perhaps being discursively silenced) is not just a process of pain, but also a process of potential. There is potential within silence if one utilises it as a survival strategy, and there is potential within breaking a silence. When sexual subjects are explicitly given a voice, they are given the opportunity to turn the narrative around – to redirect it from a *story* into a *device* for identity politics: "The private pains increasingly become public ones; the personal sufferings become collective participations; the pathological languages turn into political ones" (Plummer, 1995, p. 110). This enables us to see social research, especially sexual scholarship, as a place where platforms can be provided to multiply the voices of marginalised sexualities and place the focus on their lived experiences. After all, it is a space for the social researcher to decide whose "side" they are on in the shadows cast by hegemonic power.

Knowing versus ignorance: Silencing bisexuality

In choosing our "side", we acknowledge the power dynamics which oppress, and we lend our voices to the unheard. Those in positions of power prioritise and grant privilege to certain knowledges over others, allowing unprivileged knowledge to be silenced or rendered invisible. Miranda Fricker's (2007) work focuses on these power/knowledge interactions, and contributes to the development of a theoretical framework regarding epistemic injustice, which we can apply to bisexual marginalisation. Fricker (2007) discusses two types of epistemic misconduct that can occur simultaneously as well as autonomously: hermeneutical injustice and testimonial injustice. These injustices, as the word "epistemic" implies, revolve around marginalisation *through* knowledge.

This marginalisation (testimonial injustice, hermeneutical injustice, and wilful hermeneutic ignorance) comes from the invalidation of a group's

lived experiences, and by preventing them from advancing discursive knowledge about those lived experiences, either out of ignorance or due to deliberate denial. Specifically, testimonial injustice is the inherent disadvantage of a marginalised group that cannot be heard due to society's perception and interpretation of its experience. These perceptions and interpretations, which can be seen as stigmas (such as sexism and binegativity), in return skew the ability of these marginalised groups to make sense of their own experiences.

This can be elaborated with an example: "I am a bisexual person, and I feel uncomfortable trying to fit in with both the heterosexual and the lesbian and gay community; I feel like I do not belong anywhere". If "society" then turns to me and says, "That is not true, you belong everywhere, because as a bisexual you are heterosexual as well as gay", then my experiences are made invalid. Therefore, I cannot provide a true testament to my experience, and the knowledge I am trying to impart to society is silenced (Fricker, 2007).

Second, there is hermeneutical injustice – that is, the inability of marginalised groups to add to knowledge about their position – due to a lack of societal resources. This in turn results in the group's inability to articulate its own marginalised experience; this is referred to as situated hermeneutic inequality. To give an example through the academic discourse surrounding bisexuality: if bisexuality is subsumed within lesbian and gay studies, but fails to be seen as a topic of autonomous scholarship, a bisexual person cannot find the knowledge or language they need to develop an understanding of their own experience (Monro, 2015). Pohlhaus (2012, p. 715) takes hermeneutic injustice one step further by asserting that this injustice is not built upon a lack of knowledge or an inability to grasp it, hereby referring to it as "wilful hermeneutic ignorance". Wilful hermeneutic ignorance happens when people in dominant positions of power *purposefully* ignore the experiences of the marginalised (Pohlhaus, 2017). Yoshino (2000) and Erickson-Schroth & Mitchell (2009) indicate that wilful hermeneutic ignorance is an underlying issue in sexual scholarship's relationship with bisexuality. Such unawareness can be very harmful: To wilfully reject/ignore/erase the experiences of marginalised groups keeps the power structures that silence those groups in place.

It is important to address a more contemporary understanding of bisexual identity, not only to acknowledge the desire to categorise sexualities, but also to examine the political and social mechanisms inherent in these power structures. As bisexuality shifted away from the medicalisation of sex (which had created an epistemic void by not establishing bisexuality as a sexual identity, as well as by pathologising it), the notion of bisexuality as the in-between of monosexual identities embedded itself deeper within discourse. Despite the development of sexuality research, bisexuality remained remarkably unaddressed. Kinsey's (1948) research on sexual behaviour and attraction (which placed participants on a scale between exclusively monosexual identities) did not just successfully combat the pathologisation

of sexuality, but also emphasised that a wider scale of sexual possibilities existed. However, Germon (2008, p. 255) argues that Kinsey's research perpetuates the failure to recognise bisexuality as an autonomous sexuality, because it indicates "bisexuality's complexity [while at] the same time it gestures toward the impossibility of capturing that complexity with a single signifier". Germon (2008, p. 255) discusses "bisexuality as a descriptive noun [which] covers a vast array of non-gendered sexual styles, sensibilities, and practices because there are countless ways in which one can be bisexual". Barker and colleagues (2012) point out that the descriptive conceptualisation of bisexuality derives not only from discourse, but also from cultural understandings. Rust (2000) indicates that these descriptors are personal understandings that come in a great variety, indicating that there is no such thing as a single bisexual identity. As the gendered/sexed aspect of bisexual sexual attraction is not restricted to cisgendered people alone, it should also encompass attraction to nonconforming genders (people who identify as transgender, non-binary, intersex, etc.) (see Callis, 2014; Monro, 2015; Rust, 2000; Swan & Habibi, 2018). Ochs (2015, para 2) thus defines bisexuality broadly, as all-encompassing:

The potential to be attracted – romantically and/or sexually – to people of more than one sex and/or gender, not necessarily at the same time, not necessarily in the same way. And not necessarily to the same degree.

This multiplicity of bisexual attraction, behaviour, and identity not only reveals the fluidity of sexuality, but also simultaneously complicates the bisexual position within identity politics. For example, "one challenge of uniting non-monosexual communities is the balancing act of being inclusive enough to avoid unintentionally excluding others while remaining cohesive enough to move together in collective action" (Flanders, 2017, p. 2). There is the issue of identification based on acceptance: Callis (2014) found that bisexual individuals sometimes used other labels of identification (such as queer), because these were granted more validity, recognition, and visibility within the broader LGBT community. Some research has also indicated that there are bisexual people who simply do not care about identity labels, or who use different labels in different contexts as a form of individual agency (Maliapaard, 2018a). Israel (2018) addresses how the desire to categorise and classify sexualities can lead to the enforcement of labels that ultimately invalidate the authenticity of bisexual identity. To be aware that one does not erase experiences based on the differentiation between cultural consensus and self-identification is to accept these identifications as authentic – despite a potential terminological disagreement or potential political incoherence. One person's bisexual identity can be another person's pansexual (which is another person's queer, and another person's heteroflexible, etc.) – and at times, several terms are employed simultaneously (Rust, 2000). These different identifications make it harder to lay an *epistemic foundation* for

a multifaceted category such as bisexuality, which raises the issue of “political dilution” (Flanders, 2017). Arguably, this is where sexual scholarship can make a distinction between queer studies and bisexuality studies, or can address bisexuality more comprehensively as well as acknowledging its autonomy. As Elia and Eliason (2012, p. 4) note:

Although bisexuality studies has grown in prominence as an academic sub-field within sexuality studies over the past several years, it has mostly existed in the shadows of gay and lesbian studies and more recently it has been in the shadow of transgender studies as well.

Scholars such as Angelides (2001), Callis (2009), Hemmings (2002, 2007), Monro (2015), and Monro, Hines, & Osborne (2017) have criticised academic spaces for their marginalising practices – and particularly queer theory for its lack of engagement with bisexuality: “In spite of occupying an epistemic position within this very opposition, the category of bisexuality has been curiously marginalised and erased from the deconstructive field of queer theory” (Angelides, 2001, p. 7). Moreover, Monro’s (2015) work states that queer theory (and queer politics) can even add to the erasure of bisexuality, due to queer theory’s inherently destabilising epistemic nature. The creation of a unified queer identity potentially loses bisexual experience rather than acknowledging bisexuality and its discourse as autonomous. However, Hemmings (2007) suggests that queer theory’s lack of interaction with bisexuality revolves around the conceptualisation of bisexuality as an identity that both solidifies binary identity categories (i.e. it highlights the opposites) and undermines them (i.e. sexuality is fluid). This ontological critique not only shows the importance of the disempowered status of the bisexual subject, but also highlights the position of bisexual identity. Bisexuality *is* the space that defies the discursive divides of sexuality, power, and knowledge.

Methods of marginalisation

Earlier in this chapter, experience was mentioned as playing a key role in the understanding of the lives of marginalised groups. As hooks (1984, p. ix) explains in *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*, “to be in the margin is to be part of the whole, but outside the main body”. This has already become evident with bisexuality scholarship in relation to the main body of knowledge on sexuality. While we will not move away from discourse entirely, as it is intricately connected to experience, it is important to see how bisexual marginalisation happens in practice. Yoshino (2000) has written about the methods of bisexual erasure, building on the work of scholars such as Ault (1996) and James (1996), who criticise the monosexual/plurisexual binary. Plurisexual identities are sexualities that are not based on singular sexed/gendered attraction; they include bisexual, queer, pansexual, and fluid identities

(Galupo et al., 2014; Swan & Habibi, 2018). Yoshino (2000) focuses on mechanisms of bisexual erasure by both straight and homosexual people, and asks what monosexual people have to gain from such epistemic violence. His essay considers not only the “hows” but also the “whys”, positing three arguments as to *why* monosexuals might erase bisexuality: (1) for identity stability; (2) to maintain sexual attraction as a form of distinction; and (3) to combat (bisexuality as) a threat to monogamy.

In regard to identity stability, we can draw upon the discursive and political distinctions discussed previously in this chapter. Heterosexuality has a privileged position within identity politics, and therefore has a whole plethora of other privileges (Ahmed, 2006; Ochs, 1996; Rubin, 1984). These privileges in turn “straighten” all subjects, forcing systemic heterosexuality upon all transgressive sexualities, genders, and identities (Ahmed, 2006). Therefore, those who identify as lesbian/gay have to heavily safeguard their political position, as their lesbian/gay identity arises from an ongoing sociopolitical struggle that stems from (and can conform to) compulsory heterosexuality (Puar, 2007; Welzer-Lang, 2008). According to Yoshino (2000), these positions are complicated by the existence of bisexuality, which suggests a lack of “truth” in monosexuality – which chimes with the lack of “truth and proof” of bisexuality, discussed above (see Callis, 2009). If bisexuality exists, you can never fully “prove” you are hetero- or homosexual. This can lead to a position in which straight people might lose privilege, or lesbian and gay people might lose the rights for which they have had to battle – a potential loss of political positioning, which in turn requires a defence.

To “discriminate erotically on the basis of sex” (Yoshino, 2000, p. 4) stems from the discursive divide between sexual morality and desire (Foucault, 1978; Weeks, 2017). To desire one and not the other entails an intense focus on someone’s sex/gender as a prerequisite for sexual and romantic affection (Yoshino, 2000). This requires the world to be built in dichotomous categories of desire and non-desire (Diamond, 2008). Therefore, if we take the importance of singular sex/gender out of that categorisation, the concept of (mono)sexual stability falls apart. Likewise, discrimination against bisexuals as a supposed threat to monogamous relationships comes from the deployment of the often-used stigma that bisexuals are promiscuous (Barker et al., 2012; Van Alphen, 2017). According to Rust (1992, 2000), this stigma is built around the cis-orientated understanding that bisexuals are unable to be sexually satisfied by only one partner, and therefore require two – one (cis) man and one (cis) woman. The (re)iteration of this binegative stigma not only undermines the normalisation of bisexuality as a whole, but also sustains the notion that bisexuals are not capable of loving, fulfilling, and (if desired) monogamous relationships.

Further to Yoshino’s (2000) analysis of *why* monosexuals epistemically erase bisexuality, he makes three arguments regarding *how* this erasure is deployed: through (1) class erasure; (2) individual erasure; and

(3) delegitimation. The erasure of bisexuality primarily revolves around the lack of validation and recognition of bisexual identities as legitimate. Class erasure (“class” in the sense of “category”, as seen in Foucauldian deconstruction, rather than in the socio-economic sense) describes the erasure of bisexuality as a legitimate or autonomous sexual identity. As mentioned above, this is a form of hermeneutic injustice that is particularly evident within academia (James, 1996; MacDowall, 2009; Monro, Hines, & Osborne, 2017). With individual erasure, however, the lack of validation occurs on a personal level: it accepts and recognises bisexuality as a legitimate sexuality, but it excludes the individual from that identification. Such erasure is often rationalised through the idea that the individual is experimenting with their sexuality (Ault, 1996; Brewster & Moradi, 2010; Rust, 1992). Interestingly, as mentioned by Maliepaard (2017a, 2017b), this belief is also internalised by bisexual individuals, causing them to doubt their own romantic and sexual attractions to multiple sexes/genders due to the discursive understanding of the normative sexual binary. While the previous methods certainly also delegitimise bisexuality, the method of delegitimation (Yoshino, 2000) takes the form of a far more deliberate act: wilful hermeneutic injustice (Pohlhaus, 2012). Moreover, it takes this injustice a step further: The delegitimation of bisexuality requires the acknowledgement of bisexuality as a category, yet purposely upholds negative views against those who identify with that category, thus becoming a form of violence as (such as microaggression, see Botswick & Hequembourg, 2014). This is also referred to as “the politics of delegitimization” (Erickson-Schroth & Mitchell, 2009, p. 298), and it erases any positive associations of bisexuality with stability, undermines its validation, and reduces its visibility.

The discursive treatment of bisexuality can arguably be viewed as a form of epistemic violence, through the intentional or unintentional refusal to allow bisexual individuals to have a voice and to have their experiences heard (Dotson, 2011; Fricker, 2007). The epistemic erasure of bisexuality manages to uphold binegative attitudes and beliefs, which in turn can unwittingly be internalised by bisexual individuals (Frost & Meyer, 2009). Likewise, through the imposition of binegative values onto bisexual experience, bisexual individuals suffer from symbolic violence (Monro, 2015), which can ultimately lead to mental, physical, and sexual health issues (Barker et al., 2012). McLean (2018) argues that the implications of living invisible lives are detrimental, and that significant change is required to break the cycle of marginalisation due to epistemic and interpersonal erasure:

Poorer rates of health, as well as substantially lower levels of identity disclosure, are significant contributors to the isolation of bisexual people. Given these things, finding supportive sexual minority communities is vital to developing a positive bisexual identity, and connections with

other bisexual people in particular provides support to those who are socially isolated. Increased visibility and greater legitimacy of bisexuality in society is key if bisexual people are to find supportive bisexual individuals and communities.

(McLean, 2018, pp. 88–89)

Conclusion

With the emergence of sexual medicalisation, Western society built itself around a dichotomous structure of sex, sexuality, and gender. This discursive categorisation of identities led to an ongoing struggle for legitimisation and sociopolitical rights. Bisexuality has been caught in the monosexual fray, suffering from an epistemic injustice that renders this sexual identity invisible, unseen, and disregarded. This epistemic injustice has both academic and interpersonal ramifications, and the mechanisms of erasure and delegitimation position bisexuality in an uncomfortable place. Compulsory heterosexuality and the monosexual divide ensure that plurisexual individuals question the legitimacy of their own experiences. Being placed on the margins, or in between the binaries, bisexual individuals can suffer from stigmatisation, discrimination, and subsequent mental health issues. Bisexual voices need to be heard, and bisexual stories need to be listened to, in order to undo the injustice faced by bisexuality – allowing it to flourish into an autonomous sexual identity, and an equally autonomous field of sexual scholarship.

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11 Bisexuality as an identity and a conceptual tool in sexual politics in Finland

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Introduction

Bisexuality as a recognised identity started to emerge in the Finnish mainstream media in the early 1990s. Before that, bisexuality was a concept used in sexual minority politics as well as in porn and sensation magazines. However, a separate bisexual identity was not recognisable due to the generalised use of the concept. Only in the late 1980s did people who defined themselves as bisexual begin to be active in sexual minority politics. Currently, bisexuality is a visible part of sexual minority politics in Finland; however, the stereotypes drawn decades before continue to impact the experiences and identities of the people who define themselves bisexual.

The research on which this chapter is based has a time range of almost 50 years (Kangasvuo, 2014). Over those years, Finland experienced significant cultural changes that impacted the positions of bisexuality in the country's sexual culture. These positions have multiplied and transformed through the years. Today, bisexuality has several different and contrasting positions in the Finnish sexual culture. The motivation for the research lies in my own bisexual identification.

In this chapter, I answer the following questions: How was the concept of bisexuality formed in different decades in Finnish sexual culture? How has the bisexual identity become possible? What kinds of experiences do bisexual people have?

Research material and methods

The research material consists of interview data, data gathered via participant observation, and media texts. I attended numerous bisexual groups, parties, and conventions during the research process from 1999 to 2014.

I used ethnographical writing to analyse the research material (see Richardson & St Pierre, 2005). My theoretical background is based on the ideas of symbolic anthropology that rely on ethnographical thick description as described by cultural anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1993).

I contextualised my findings by taking the time period and cultural situation into account when analysing the data.

I interviewed¹ 40 Finnish bisexuals in the years 1999, 2005, and 2009–2010. All together 52 interviews were conducted and 12 interviewees were interviewed twice. The interviews form a longitudinal study on the experiences and identities of Finnish bisexuals.

I collected material from three different fields of the media from the time period 1969–2011. First, I analysed publications² by Finnish organisations that concentrate on sexual minority politics. Second, I analysed volumes of Finnish porn magazines from four decades. Third, I collected bisexuality-themed articles from mainstream magazines and newspapers. I used critical discourse analysis (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997) to examine the media texts.

The complexity and the long timeline of the research material mean it is possible to make informed generalisations about the status and the role of the concept of bisexuality in Finnish sexual culture. In this chapter, I refer to my research material in the following manner: if I highlight the research material specifically – for instance, “porn magazines of 1990s” – the argument is based on this material. When I do not refer to specific research material, my argument is a generalisation drawn from all the material. Certain themes and forms constantly repeat in discussions that concern bisexuality. I aim to frame the discussions and themes within a more general cultural context.

Changes in legislation

Legislation provides a timeline for understanding the changes in sexual culture. In Finland, “same-sex fornication” (RL 20:12§) was decriminalized in 1971. Finland decriminalised homosexual acts quite late compared with other Nordic countries. For example, same-sex sexuality was permitted in Denmark in 1933, in Iceland in 1940, and in Sweden in 1944. Norway decriminalised same-sex sexuality as late as in 1972 (Rydström, 2007). Legislative and cultural changes in Sweden were observed closely in Finland through the post-war decades and also used as examples for Finnish legislation.

Before 1971, Finnish discussions about same-sex sexuality were centred around its criminality, as well as homosexuality as a psychiatric diagnosis for sexual deviation. Public discussions about same-sex sexuality as lived experiences or as an identity became fully possible only after the decriminalisation. However, concurrently with the decriminalisation, a new law was written: “public encouraging to fornication with a person of the same sex” (RL 20:9§) became prohibited by law. The punishment ranged from monetary fines to up to six months in prison. The law was passed, although there was already a strict law on the distribution of obscene publications (Ri 5 28.1.1927/23), which made it possible to regulate public discussions about sexuality in general (Jyränki, 2007).

The reasoning behind the new law was the psychiatric theory that homosexuality was a disease, and that any positive information about it would prevent people from getting treatment. Homosexuality was not a criminal act anymore, but it was still seen as a disease. It was assumed that public discussions about homosexuality would make it spread wildly among the general public. The law prohibiting encouraging homosexuality led to charges only twice during the 28 years that it was in effect, and no sentences were handed down. In 1981, the National Board of Health removed same-sex sexuality from the list of psychosexual disorders, but the law remained. The law was abolished only in 1999, but it was not truly enforced after the early 1980s (Stålström, 1997; Stålström & Nissinen, 2003).

However, the law induced self-censorship among the mainstream media, especially in the Yleisradio, the publicly funded national broadcasting company (Månsson, 1984). The law resulted in same-sex sexualities being ignored by the Finnish media. As homosexuality was silenced in the mainstream media, so was bisexuality. In the 1970s and early 1980s, same-sex sexualities were only written about in media that were not perceived as respectable or mainstream. Same-sex sexualities – as well as non-normative genders – were discussed in porn magazines, sensational magazines, and sexual minority political publications (Juvonen, 2004). Thus, these “non-respectable, non-mainstream” publications form the core of my research material.

While porn magazines did use pornified stereotypes of bisexuality and other sexualities in porn stories and other material that aimed to excite the reader, they also published articles that aimed to educate and inform their audience. It is noteworthy that porn magazines attended public and political discussions about sexuality, and during the decades of self-censorship of the mainstream media, porn magazines covered issues of sexual and gender minorities in a positive and accepting manner. Porn magazines took a diverse approach to sexuality in general (Paasonen, 2009).

The sexual minority rights remained somewhat unchanged until the 2000s, but discrimination based on sexual orientation at work and in services became prohibited in 1999. The act on registered partnership for same-sex couples was passed in 2001 (L 9.11.2001/950) and, with the exception of adoption rights and the right to take the same family name, the law was comparable to the marriage law. Adoption within the family – that is, adopting the child of the registered spouse – became possible in 2009, but adoption outside the family was still prohibited (L 8.2.1985/153). Another law that regulates family rights of same-sex couples is the law on infertility treatment that was passed in 2006 (L 22.12.2006/1237). The law makes artificial insemination judicially available for female couples. Before this, individual clinics decided themselves whether or not to give treatment to female couples.

In early years of the 2010s, the discussions about marriage rights became more heated. In 2013, Citizens' Initiative for Equal Marriage Law gained

the needed 50,000 signatures in less than a day (Lahti, 2015). The law was passed in 2014 and became effective in 2017. It removed the mention of the partners' sex from the marriage law. Since then, there has been no difference in marriage rights of same-sex or different-sex couples (Avioliittolaki 1929, p. 234).

Universal bisexual desire legitimises homosexuality

Bisexuality as an identity – or indeed any sexual identity – is possible only in a cultural atmosphere where sexual desire is assumed to be essential for the understanding of oneself. A cultural atmosphere like this is not a given: even if same-sex desires and sexual acts have been present in all human cultures and communities, it is only in some of them that the sexual desire and sexual acts are assumed to define a person's identity in an essentialist way.

Analysis of publications of sexual minority political organisations shows that in early Finnish sexual minority politics, the role of bisexuality was to legitimate homosexuality. Human sexuality was defined as universally bisexual and all people were seen to have at least some bisexuality in them. The universal nature of bisexuality was used to make same-sex desire and homosexuality more understandable and acceptable within the culture. Thus, it was claimed that condemning homosexuality would mean condemning humanity in and of itself, since humanity was seen to be essentially bisexual.

The idea of a universal bisexual desire as universal possibly has its origins in simplifications of Alfred Kinsey's studies of human sexuality, and the lay interpretations of Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytical theory. Interestingly, these two authorities of bisexuality are mentioned in all my material – porn magazines, publications of sexual minority organisations, and the interviews – and in all decades of this study.

Sexual minority political organisations' publications portrayed people who defined themselves as homosexual as conscious of their bisexual nature, which connected all people. In the 1970s, homosexuality did not mean exclusive same-sex desire, but same-sex desire in general. A homosexual was a person who chose to be honest about his (sic) sexual desire and who rejected normative life choices such as marriage.

Bisexuals were presented as people who were not ready to name themselves as homosexual, despite their same-sex desire. Bisexuality meant a fearful retreat to normative life choices and declining a homosexual identity. These "bisexual men" were described either as dishonest or as victims of the sexually repressed culture. Also in porn magazines, bisexuality was provided to the reader as a term that could be used if one could not or did not dare to name himself (sic) as homosexual. Bisexuality was presented as a safer and less radical way to define oneself than homosexuality. "Bisexuality" was not a term used by the men themselves, but rather one with which they were defined from the outside. There was no room for an open and public bisexual identity.

In porn magazines, this use of the concept of bisexuality prevailed from the 1970s to the 2000s. However, bisexuality as a mild version of homosexuality vanished from the publications of sexual minority political associations before the early 1990s, about the same time bisexuality became recognised as a sexual identity distinct from homosexuality.

In the 1970s, bisexuality was seen either as the potential of sexuality that united humanity, or an unidentified potential of homosexuality in a person. Bisexuality was considered a form of homosexuality, something that was a result of rejecting or being ashamed of same-sex desire, or being ignorant about the possibility of homosexual identity. Before the 1990s, bisexuality was a non-identity and it had no political content. The term acquired political meaning only when it was used in the discussions that concerned homosexuality and homosexual identity. Bertilsdotter Rosqvist (2012) has gained comparable results by analysing the discourses on marriage and married men in the Swedish gay press published in the period 1954–86.

Since the 1970s, bisexuality has been used to explain and legitimise same-sex desire. In a cultural situation in which same-sex desire was seen as threatening or repulsive, the concept of bisexuality made homosexuality more comprehensible. If bisexuality connects all people, it also shows how homosexuality and heterosexuality are parallel to each other.

Bisexual identity becomes possible

The first people who identified as bisexual started to be active in sexual minority organisations in the early years of the 1990s. These early activists wrote about bisexuality and talked openly about it. As a result of their identity political activism, bisexuality became a publicly acknowledged concept within sexual minority organisations as well as a sexual identity, and a basis for forming sexual communities and discussion groups. The change is manifested in the texts published in sexual minority associations' magazines that were written by self-identified bisexuals, but also in the texts published in mainstream magazines and newspapers, in which bisexuality was presented as "a new phenomenon". Bisexuality as a sexual minority political identity became visible also to the mainstream culture.

In 1997, *Helsingin Sanomien Kuukausiliite*, the monthly magazine of the most prominent newspaper of Finland, published a big article on bisexuality. The bisexuals interviewed for the article were presented with their own names and faces. The article marks the point after which it was culturally more acceptable to name oneself publicly as bisexual than before. Most of my interviewees remembered the article and said they were glad about the visibility that bisexuality gained through the article.

The talk about bisexual identity strived to break prejudices of bisexuality and diversify the notions of sexuality in general, as well as make bisexual people acceptable in gay and lesbian communities. Bertilsdotter (2001) has shown that the visibility of bisexuality increased in Swedish LGBT

movement in the same decade: openly bisexual people became active in gay and lesbian organisations, the first discussion groups for bisexuals were organised, bisexuality was written about in magazines, a mailing list for bisexual activists was created, and the first bi section was organised in the Stockholm Pride parade in 1999. Finnish bisexual activists worked together with Swedish and international activists and attended events organised by bisexual activists around Europe.

During the same decade, the term “queer” emerged in Finnish sexual minority political discussions. The term was adopted as is; it was not translated into Finnish. Some suggestions for translation of the term “queer” appeared, but none of them took root in sexual political activism. The discussions of the concept of queer and the bisexual identity were concurrent. It is possible that the discussions about queer made the bisexual identity politically comprehensible, since queer shook the categories of homosexuality and heterosexuality, both of which are based on the idea of monosexuality (see Hemmings, 1997). My informants were very conscious about the discussions about queer already in 1999: most of them recognised the term and some had also read international queer activist texts.

The experiences of my interviewees demonstrate the increased availability of the concept of bisexuality as a tool for identification in the 1990s. The interviewees born before the 1970s said that they encountered the term “bisexuality” only in the 1990s, and formed their bisexual identity in adulthood, even in their late middle age. Before the 1990s, bisexuality as a concept was not used to define sexual identity widely enough for the concept to be accessible or understandable. The younger interviewees, by comparison, did not need to find the term “bisexual”, since it was already culturally available. Identifying as bisexual was easier to them than it had been to earlier generations.

The demarcation of the concept of homosexuality

Over the 15 years during which I have studied bisexuality, there have been changes in the accessibility of a bisexual identity. For example, I interviewed women who had initially identified as lesbian, because the term was more accessible for self-definition when they recognised their potential for same-sex desire (Kangasvuo, 2006). It was only later that they encountered the term “bisexual” and realised that bisexuality described their sexual desire and life experiences better than the term “lesbian”. Initially the concept of bisexuality either was not familiar to them at all, or they had seen it to be used only in pornified and hypersexualised contexts to which they did not relate.

The term “lesbian” also offered a chance to join lesbian communities when bisexual communities did not yet exist. A lesbian identity was culturally comprehensible: it provided the possibility of following a clear identity-forming process that included coming out of the closet, being

sexual politically active, and becoming a member of lesbian communities. It was only in the late 1990s that the concept of bisexuality became public and multifaceted enough that these women could relate to it (Kangasvuo, 2006).

However, some of these women chose to define themselves as both bisexual and lesbian. Often they were publicly lesbian and privately bisexual. Some said they were completely closeted bisexuals in lesbian communities, and expressed that their public identity was lesbian mainly due to the prejudices against bisexuality in lesbian communities (Ault, 1996; Bower et al., 2002; Maliepaard, 2017). For others, “being lesbian” did not refer to sexual desire but relationship choices and belonging to lesbian communities; they used the term “lesbian” since it was a more comprehensible term than “bisexual”:

If someone thinks that it’s just my sexual orientation that I refer to when I say I am lesbian, then they might also say that I am bluffing. If other people would be free from the stigma that is linked to the sexual preferences, then I could say publicly that I am bisexual.

(Female interviewee, born 1976, interviewed 2005)

The binegativity in lesbian and gay communities has been studied and shown to be prevalent in countries other than Finland – for instance, Sweden (Gustavson, 2006), the United Kingdom (Barker et al., 2012), France (Welzer-Lang, 2008), the United States (Mulick & Wright Jr, 2002), and Australia (McLean, 2008).

The option of a bisexual identity in the current sexual culture also means that gay and lesbian identities have become narrower. While in the 1970s and the 1980s homosexuality meant that same-sex desire was present in a person’s repertoire of desire, in the 1990s homosexuality started to mean that different-sex desire was excluded from a person who felt same-sex desire. In the 1970s, same-sex desire was not contrasted with different-sex desire – namely heterosexuality – but with normative life choices like marriage. Same-sex desire and normative life choices were presented as mostly incompatible, except in very special circumstances. “Gay man and his wife”, as described in a title of an article published in a porn magazine in 1977, could live happily together if the wife (assumed to be heterosexual) understood the same-sex desire of her husband.

In the current sexual culture, homosexuality is monolithic and does not have space for different-sex desire. According to my interviewees, different-sex desire is often seen as improper in lesbian and gay communities, as well as in those cases in which a member of these communities defines their sexuality as bisexual. The interviewees told how their bisexuality was repeatedly questioned in gay and lesbian communities, and said this othering contributed to separate homosexual and bisexual identities. “How can you define yourself as bisexual? Don’t you think about your girlfriend’s feelings at all?” one female interviewee (born 1975, interviewed 2009) was asked

by a member of a lesbian community to which she belonged. Bisexual self-definition made the interviewee's attachment to her partner questionable in the opinion of the members of the lesbian community. Lahti (2015, 2018) has studied Finnish bisexual women's relationships and shown that bisexuality does not fit into the normative discourse about relationships. Thus, it tends to become invisible regardless of the gender of the partner. Reflecting the experience of my interviewee, bisexuality is also forced to become invisible in lesbian communities due to the prejudices against it.

Thus, the concept of bisexuality has also formed the concept of homosexuality. The possibility of different-sex desire is completely excluded from the concept of homosexuality. My Finnish research results can be compared with the interpretation of Angelides (2001), according to whom the concept of homosexuality has become more rigid since the emergence of the concept of bisexuality in the field of sexual politics. Homosexuality has grown to become the most recognisable sexual identity that is juxtaposed with the self-evident normativity of heterosexuality. Compared with them, bisexuality is still seen as a fleeting phenomenon.

The hypersexualised bisexuality

By the 2000s, bisexuality had become a concept that referred mostly to young women's sexuality and not to married men's sexuality, as it was in the 1970s and the early 1980s. Especially in the mainstream media, the word "bisexual" was linked to young women. In this use, the term appears as transitory and temporary, describing something that one will grow out of (see also Gomillion & Giuliano, 2011; Kangasvuo, 2002). While the bisexuality of married men appeared as problematic, since it indicated a same-sex desire that could threaten marriage and a heteronormative lifestyle, it was still presented as intrinsic and immutable. In contrast, the bisexuality of young women appeared as exciting, ephemeral, and fashionable. This means that in the current Finnish sexual culture it is easier for young women to recognise and name their sexual desire as bisexual than it is for other age groups of women or men in general. In the Finnish sexual culture, there is space for young woman's bisexuality, but the space is very narrow, and it gets narrower when the woman ages.

From the 1990s to the 2010s, young women's bisexuality was used to titillate and excite the audiences of both porn magazines and the mainstream media, especially tabloid newspapers. Bisexuality provided a fantasy to be consumed by different audiences. Young women's bisexuality was described and represented in a voyeuristic way – indeed, the primary way to illustrate articles about bisexuality was to show young women with feminine appearances in erotic situations with each other. The mainstream media texts also approached bisexuality in a pornified manner (Kangasvuo, 2007).

Interestingly, in the porn magazines of the 2000s, bisexuality was addressed from several different perspectives when compared with the

mainstream media texts. Porn magazines published more texts about bisexuality than the mainstream media, and while a single text published in a mainstream magazine aimed to explain “this new and unknown phenomenon” fully, the audiences of porn magazines could be assumed to be familiar with bisexuality to start with. Porn magazines can be seen as forums for sexual education and enlightenment about sexuality compared with the mainstream media, which that often used repeating discourses and stereotypes of bisexuality.

The number of texts that concerned bisexuality increased from the 1990s to the 2010s, and this increase indicates a certain tendency in the mainstream media in which bisexuality has gotten more space than in the earlier decades. Bisexuality in and of itself cannot be defined as a trend, but the ways in which it is treated in the Finnish media can be described as trend-like. Nevertheless, trendiness is an inseparable stereotype of bisexuality. Furthermore, the increased number of media texts that consider bisexuality and people who identify as bisexual reflects an increased interest in bisexuality. Bisexuality is not a neutral term when it is used in the media. The stereotypes and notions linked to bisexuality do not cease to charm Finnish media audiences – bisexuality can still titillate both the audiences of porn and those of mainstream media.

Yet even after bisexuality became a separate identity category in the 1990s, it appears to have been less essential and more oriented towards pleasure than gay and lesbian identities, not to mention normative heterosexual identities. This attitude can also be seen in discussions about non-monogamous and bisexual people.

The discussions about non-monogamy became more difficult in the mid-2000s within Finnish gay and lesbian communities when the idea of respectability of same-sex sexualities became a central theme in sexual minority politics. Monogamy and respectability were linked to each other (Jyränki et al., 2007; Kangasvuo, 2011; Kuosmanen, 2007a, 2007b; Lahti, 2015). The normative discourse excluded those bisexuals who lived in non-monogamous relationships, and sexual minority politics did not leave space for polyamory or non-monogamous relationships in the context of bisexuality, since they would have verified the stereotype of bisexuals as hypersexual. For bisexuality to become respectable, it also had to be monogamous.

The public discussions about polyamory and multiple relationships have resurfaced only in the late 2010s, and the media discussions about polyamory are often linked to the discussions about bisexuality. There have been several publicly open media personalities who have talked about their polyamory and bisexuality in the Finnish media.³ In public discussions of polyamory, it is described in the same kinds of identity political ways in which the essentiality of polyamory is emphasised. Polyamory is not presented as a relationship choice or a way of life, but as an identity. The meaning of pleasure is downplayed in the discussions that consider polyamory, and love, communication, and emotional attachment are emphasised. The media

discussions that consider polyamory and polyamorous identity politics are parallel to the media discussions and identity politics of bisexuality (see Matilainen, 2012), since in both discussions non-monogamies are repeatedly negotiated.

As such, bisexual identity is a more private and less visible identity than other sexual identities, and it becomes visible only when related to pleasure or non-monogamous relationship practices. Bisexuality as a concept is linked to other sexual categories that do not engage in identity political activism, namely kinky, fetish, and BDSM sexualities, which appear more as categories of pleasure and less as categories of identity (see also Juvonen, 2019). In particular, the interviewed couples who engaged in swinging used the term “bisexuality” to describe their sexual pleasure and sexual activities rather than their sexual identity.

Some interviewees commented that the stereotype of bisexuals as hypersexual might have its origins in the sex-negative attitudes of the culture. They said that as bisexuals they have learned to embrace and accept their sexuality, while the people who inhibit parts of their sexualities or who have a sex-negative attitude may perceive bisexuals as hypersexual. By saying this, the interviewees positioned themselves as sex-positive.

It seems that the interviewees’ attitudes towards the stereotype of hypersexuality changed in the first decade of the 2000s. However, it is not possible to say whether the change is due to the ageing of the interviewees or a cultural change. The discussion between a female and a male interviewee, a couple I interviewed in 1999 and 2010, illustrates the change in attitudes towards the stereotype of hypersexuality:

MALE: Ten years ago everybody had a strong need to prove that bisexuals are ordinary people. We are not constantly horny and we don’t need many relationships and we can be in one monogamous relationship.

FEMALE: I don’t get it, why should we need to prove that we are like everybody else? What’s the profit in being like everybody else? Isn’t it better to be like you feel good to be?

MALE: Ten years ago there was this strong prejudice that bisexuals are whore ass sluts.

FEMALE: Maybe. And it was like being a whore ass slut would be a bad thing.

MALE: Yeah. I used the words whore ass slut as a positive term.

FEMALE: You owned it.

MALE: I’m an empowered whore ass slut. [laughs]

(Female interviewee, born 1970 and male interviewee, born 1974, interviewed 2010)

Of course, the mainstream heteronormative culture is not monolithic in its attitude towards sexuality and sexual minorities. Therefore, the interviewees’ explanation of bisexuality as a sex-positive attitude does

not reflect mainstream culture in and of itself, but rather shows how the interviewees define bisexuality as liberal, modern, and tolerant in contrast to the heteronormative mainstream culture, which they define as traditional, conservative, and intolerant. However, it must be noted that according to the Eurobarometer (2019), the Finnish attitudes towards sexual minorities are generally more tolerant than those in other European Union countries.

Hypersexuality is linked to other non-heterosexualities as well, and especially to gay men (Mowlabocus, 2007). However, in the Finnish mainstream media, the stereotypes of lesbians and gay men have gradually shifted from pornified arenas to the arenas of respectability and ordinariness after the legislative changes and the public discussions about sexual minority rights. This change has taken place since the 2000s. In contrast, the stereotypes of bisexuality do not have any hint of ordinariness or respectability: bisexuality has remained a culturally acceptable object of pornification in the Finnish media landscape (Kangasvuo, 2007).

Even today, in the Finnish mainstream media, bisexuality is presented as a less essential and more hedonistic identity than gay and lesbian identities – not to mention the normative heterosexual identity. Bisexuality is useful for entertaining and titillating different audiences, both in porn and mainstream media, but it has remained an identity that is not fully acknowledged in the Finnish sexual culture.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I traced the position of bisexuality in the Finnish sexual culture, which reflects the changes in culture and sexual politics, particularly the increased acceptability and conceivability of sexual and gender minorities in Finland in general.

One of the most significant changes in the use of the concept of bisexuality in the Finnish sexual culture relates to who it refers to. In the first decades of the studied time period, in the 1970s and 1980s, bisexuality was a concept used to describe either universal human sexuality, or men who suppressed their same-sex desire while enjoying the privilege of a heteronormative lifestyle. From the late 1980s onwards, bisexual identity politics emerged in the sexual minority political organisations and in the 1990s bisexuality became a valid sexual identity option. In the decades that have followed, the concept of bisexuality has mostly been used to describe young women's sexuality in the media. The concept of bisexuality has been clearly gendered during the researched period, but the mid-1990s marked a shift in the gendering of the concept.

However, one must remember that the youngest interviewee of the research was born in 1981. This research does not discuss how the younger generations in Finland define themselves and what bisexuality means to them. It seems that people born in the late 1980s, 1990s and the early years of the 2000s may define themselves with other terms than “bisexual”.

Anecdotal evidence indicates that among the younger generations, “pansexuality” seems to be a more popular term than “bisexuality” to define sexual desire and sexual experiences that do not fit into the conceptual boxes of heterosexuality or homosexuality.

In her recent article, Juvonen (2019) traces the terms used in self-naming. According to her study, the binary categories of gender and sexuality are in flux in Finland, especially among the younger generations. The variety of terms used for identification has increased: in addition to pansexuality, other seminal terms have emerged, such as “demisexuality” and “asexuality”, which do not exclude other identity terms. For the informants of Juvonen’s study, the boundary between bisexuality and pansexuality was random and fluid. The use of the terms depended on the context in which people talked about their identity and desire. The definitions of bisexuality and pansexuality overlap. Studies conducted in other countries have also shown that people may refer to their sexual identity as queer, pansexual and bisexual at the same time. Identities are seen as transcendent and as entailing potential to change (Flanders et al., 2017; Galupo et al., 2017).

The emergence of bisexuality as a sexual identity resulted in a more precise demarcation of homosexuality, as I have shown in this chapter. The concept of pansexuality may have similar effects on the concept of bisexuality in the future, but the concepts may also conflate into each other. Either way, for my interviewees, bisexuality is still a meaningful term to describe their identities and life experiences, and in the past three decades it has also gained comprehensibility in Finnish sexual culture. Bisexuality no longer needs to be constantly explained.

Notes

- 1 The birth years of the interviewees range from 1955 to 1981. Some 25 per cent of the interviewees were men. The gender discrepancy of the research material is partly due to the fact that Finnish bisexual activists tend to be women, which makes them eager to take part in a study like this. The discrepancy partly reflects the difference between genders (Kontula, 2008). Finnish culture grants women more fluidity in presenting their sexual desire than it does men. None of the interviewees defined themselves as transgender or other-gendered.
- 2 Publications were magazines, radio programs and information booklets. In Finland, the most prominent national organisation Seta – Seksuaalinen Tasaveroisuus ry. (Sexual Equality) has been a common arena for men, women and other-gendered people. There have been some associations that were aimed at only men or women, but they are or were small. Seta has been the main route to advance sexual minority politics. Seta has had, and still has, local sub-organisations around the country.
- 3 For example, the young adult writer Siiri Enoranta and the stand-up comedian Juuso Kekkonen. Kekkonen’s hugely successful work *Outo homo* (Strange Gay, 2012) centred on his polyamory and his experiences during the trans-process of his spouse.

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12 The invisibility of bisexual and pansexual bodies

Sexuality, appearance norms, and visual identities

Nikki Hayfield

The erasure of bisexuality and pansexuality

The invisibility and erasure of bisexuality within the wider culture has been of central concern among activists and academics (Monro, 2015). The lack of cultural recognition of bisexuality has often been attributed to the persistence of binary understandings of (sex and) sexuality. In these binary understandings of sexuality, heterosexuality and “homosexuality” are understood to be the only possibilities. Therefore, bisexuality is overlooked – or if recognised is rapidly dismissed (e.g. Hayfield et al., 2013; Monro, 2015). In more recent years, research has indicated that pansexual people may also find that their identities are invisible in similar ways to bisexual people (King, 2013; Lapointe, 2017). Personal and social identities have often been associated with particular appearance norms, which may play a part in our wider social and cultural visibility. How we dress and appear holds the potential for the expression and recognition of our identities. This recognition serves as a form of visibility, which historically has aided in creating communities and advancing LGBTQ+ rights (Cole, 2000; Hayfield, 2013; Hayfield & Wood, 2018; Huxley, Clarke, & Halliwell, 2014). To date, research on visual identities and the expression and recognition of sexuality through dress and appearance has focused mainly on lesbian and gay people. There is minimal research on bisexuality and pansexuality, and seemingly none on asexual spectrum identities that relate to attraction to more than one gender, such as biromantic and panromantic. This chapter synthesises the small body of extant literature on the expression and recognition of bisexual and pansexual appearance and visual identities. In order to situate bisexual and pansexual identities within their wider context, it is necessary to also discuss lesbian and gay appearance and visual identities.

The expression and recognition of shared sexuality through visual identities

Lesbian and gay visual identities

Dress, appearance, and style are malleable, and historically have been meaningful in the expression and recognition of identity. Those who occupy sub-cultural identities, including lesbian and gay sexualities, have a rich history of shared appearance norms (Clarke & Smith, 2015; Hayfield, 2013; Hayfield & Wood, 2018; Huxley et al., 2014). These appearance norms have enabled lesbian and gay people to recognise each other – without necessarily being recognised by heterosexual people – which has aided in solidarity and the creation of safe spaces and communities. This was especially useful when same-sex acts were criminalised and lesbian and gay identities were highly oppressed. Appearance could indicate who belonged within these communities and enabled demarcated boundaries between the subcultural group and the mainstream culture (Clarke & Smith, 2015; Clarke & Turner, 2007; Hutson, 2010; Huxley et al., 2014).

In keeping with the early sexologists' inversion theories of gender and sexuality, gay men traditionally have been understood as feminine (or effeminate) and lesbians as masculine (Clarke & Smith, 2015; Cole, 2000; Hayfield, 2013). Accordingly, gay men have sometimes been associated with rejecting (particular versions of) masculinity and investing in appearance practices more traditionally associated with (heterosexual) femininity. These have included neatly styled hair, jewellery and piercings, and tight-fitting fashionable clothing (e.g. Clarke & Smith, 2015; Hayfield, 2013; Hutson, 2010). Lesbians have sometimes been associated with a more traditionally masculine appearance through clothing, short hair, sensible shoes, and the rejection of beauty practices (e.g. Clarke & Turner, 2007; Hayfield, 2013; Huxley et al., 2014). However, such images have been problematised, and gay and lesbian looks and looking can be subtle, nuanced, and diverse. Our appearance is also likely to vary according to how different aspects of our identities intersect (e.g. our gender, sexuality, race and ethnicity, social class, and so on) (Clarke & Spence, 2013; Hayfield & Wood, 2018; Hutson, 2010; Huxley et al., 2014).

While lesbian and gay appearance norms have served as liberating, they have also been reported to be restrictive. Therefore, some may conform to appearance norms to a certain extent while simultaneously attempting to avoid strict adherence to what might be understood as stereotypes. Individuality is understood to be important and may have to be carefully negotiated within the dictates of “looking the part” (by dressing in ways that fit with lesbian and gay appearance norms) and “looking good” – both of which can become policed as a requirement of belonging within particular

communities (Clarke & Smith, 2015). In keeping with postmodern conceptualisations of identity, lesbian and gay identities have become more fragmented than in the past, and looks have diversified further. This, alongside the assimilation of lesbian and gay identities into mainstream heterosexual culture, means that these appearance norms may not be as dominant as they once were (Clarke & Smith, 2015; Clarke & Spence, 2013; Hayfield & Wood, 2018; Huxley et al., 2014; Hutson, 2010).

A lack of bisexual and pansexual visual identities

Since the late 1990s, researchers have explored whether appearance norms might exist specifically for bisexual people and whether bisexuality might therefore be expressed and recognised through visual identities. The vast majority of this research has been conducted with women. Bisexual men's appearance remains under-researched or under-theorised. Findings have consistently indicated that there is no distinctive bisexual look through which people are able to express or recognise bisexuality (e.g. Clarke & Spence, 2013; Clarke & Turner, 2007; Daly, King, & Yeadon-Lee, 2018; Hartman, 2013; Hayfield et al., 2013; Huxley et al., 2014; Taub, 1999). Nonetheless, appearance is important to some bisexual people in relation to their identities (although perhaps less so than it is to lesbian and gay people; see Clarke & Spence, 2013; Clarke & Turner, 2007). Research has identified that bisexual people recognise lesbian and gay appearance norms and that some consider how they might negotiate their appearance to express their bisexuality (e.g. Clarke & Spence, 2013; Daly et al., 2018; Hartman, 2013; Hayfield et al., 2013; Huxley et al., 2014; Taub, 1999).

In the main, there are three ways in which bisexual women in particular have constructed their appearance and visual identities. The first of these is through “borrowing” aspects of lesbian and gay dress and appearance. The second is through adopting looks that are somewhat androgynous, by blending elements of masculinity (broadly associated with lesbian styles) and femininity (broadly associated with heterosexual appearance) in how they look. This perhaps reflects early sexologists' conceptualisations of bisexuality as a mixture of masculinity and femininity, and mirrors the notion of bisexuality as “somewhere in between” heterosexual and lesbian and gay identities. It may also follow from the androgynous looks common within some feminist communities, of which bisexual women were often a part. Third, some bisexual women have reported embracing appearances that are funky, flamboyant, or associated with alternative looks and looking (e.g., hippie, Goth, punk, and so on) including through piercings and tattoos (Clarke & Spence, 2013; Daly et al., 2018; Hartman, 2013; Hayfield et al., 2013; Huxley et al., 2014; Taub, 1999). More broadly, bisexual participants have sometimes discussed how their bisexuality and the lack of a specific bisexual look offer them the freedom to express individuality, be playful with their appearance, and present an authentic version of themselves, rather

than having to adhere to any rigid appearance norms (Clarke & Spence, 2013; Hartman, 2013; Hayfield et al., 2013). Finally, the gender of a current partner or partners may factor in how bisexual women dress and appear (Davila et al., 2019; Hayfield et al., 2013; Taub, 1999). Bisexual women may thus negotiate their visual identities by fitting with lesbian aesthetics, by blending masculine and feminine looks and appearing androgynously, or by looking alternative. However, none of these is distinctive to bisexuality *per se*, and therefore these options seem unlikely to make bisexual people recognisable. If bisexual people cannot be read as bisexual, then they cannot be visible to others through dress and appearance; instead, the only way to convey bisexuality may be through direct verbal statements (Hayfield et al., 2013; Maliepaard, 2020). This lack of a discernable bisexual visual identity feasibly plays a part in the broader cultural invisibility of bisexuality.

To date, there has seemingly been no research that has specifically focused on pansexual appearance and visual identities. However, in research focused on other topics, participants have made reference to visibility and dress and appearance. A recent study (Davila et al., 2019) focused on whether or how bisexual (70.7 per cent), pansexual (12.9 per cent), and queer (11.1 per cent) participants tried to make their sexuality visible to others. Over half (57.6 per cent) reported that they did try to make themselves visible. One way in which they did so was through visual displays, including changing their dress to be “more or less masculine and feminine” or wearing “gender-neutral clothing” (Davila et al., 2019, p. 205). Some participants also reported wearing clothing or jewellery in Pride (e.g. rainbow) or bisexual (e.g. pink, blue, and purple) colours, and having tattoos (Davila et al., 2019). It is not possible from this report to ascertain whether those who engaged in these strategies included any of the pansexual participants. Therefore, it is difficult to know whether this study replicates previous findings in relation to bisexual appearance or extends them to indicate that pansexual people may engage in similar practices.

The intersections of identities

As for all sexualities, those who are pansexual and bisexual are likely to negotiate multiple and intersecting identities. In a study focused on bisexual and pansexual people’s faith and sexuality, one pansexual participant mentioned clothing. Alex (Mexican American) grew up within a cultural context where the expectation was that women should wear dresses, and her mother had requested that she modify her appearance by removing her baseball cap, because women should “look a certain way” (Levy & Harr, 2018, p. 199). Pansexual and bisexual students have reported feeling that both their multiracial and their bisexual and pansexual identities were invisible to others. Therefore, they were at risk of their sexual and racial identities being misread or ignored. Some engaged in practices to try to make their identities visible to others, including through clothes, tattoos, and other

symbols – which they recognised as an aspect of fitting in and belonging within their identity groups (e.g. King, 2013).

Pansexuality has sometimes been construed as an identity that is explicitly inclusive of trans people, and those who identify as pansexual and bisexual may also identify as trans and/or with identities that disrupt gender binaries (e.g. Gonel, 2013; Morandini, Blaszczyński, & Dar-Nimrod, 2017). Historically, gender has been understood within a fixed and binary model. These dichotomous understandings of gender resulted in the notion that trans people were born (and “trapped”) in “the wrong body”. Therefore, the assumption was that to be trans inevitably meant a desire to transition and become “opposite” to their gender assigned at birth, often through hormonal and sometimes surgical interventions. However, understandings of trans identities have diversified. Increasing numbers of people do not seek medical changes to their gender. Further, many identify with terms that capture fluidity and disrupt the binaries of male/female, masculine/feminine, and man/woman (e.g. agender, genderfluid, genderqueer, non-binary, and pangender) (Diamond & Butterworth, 2008; Garrison, 2018; Richards et al., 2016). Trans identities in general have both diversified and become increasingly culturally visible, which has resulted in trans people’s (identities and) appearance coming under constant scrutiny (e.g. Garrison, 2018).

Individual presentations of our gender are impossible to opt out of. Those who are trans may manage their appearance in relation to their gender through their dress, demeanour, and wider appearance practices (Diamond & Butterworth, 2008; Garrison, 2018; Richards et al., 2016). For example, some genderqueer bisexual participants have reported that their appearance is “decidedly masculine” (e.g. Lori, participant in Diamond & Butterworth, 2008, p. 368). In one study, some genderqueer participants assigned female at birth reported that they managed their appearance by breast binding, growing their body hair, and having haircuts traditionally associated with men. Genderqueer participants assigned male at birth reported wearing jewellery and cosmetics, having long hair, removing body and facial hair, and altering their gait. While it may be difficult to manage appearance without drawing on conventional gender binaries, some have tried to blur the boundaries by dressing androgynously or combining aspects of dress and clothing traditionally associated with men/masculinities and with women/femininities (Rankin & Beemyn, 2012). In so doing, those who are genderqueer/genderfluid/non-binary may be presenting their gender ambiguously and destabilising dichotomous constructions of gender (Garrison, 2018; Richards et al., 2016). Those who present as ambiguous or androgynous may find that others notice and question their gender presentation. However, the result might not be that they are read as non-binary; instead, their gender may be misrecognised by others who only draw on gender binaries in their interpretations of appearance (see Garrison, 2018).

The appearance of those who broadly identify as trans, and as bisexual or pansexual, may be particularly complex and nuanced. The idea of blending

aspects of masculine and feminine looks and looking resonates with the literature on bisexual and (perhaps) pansexual dress and appearance. Blurring the boundaries of binaries fits with fluid understandings of both gender *and* sexuality, and is reflected in the wide range of contemporary identities often taken up by younger people in particular. It may be that, for trans people, negotiating appearance in relation to gender is more salient than expressing their sexuality through how they dress and appear. Nonetheless, there are likely overlaps between disrupting and blurring the binaries of gender and of sexuality – not least because these have often been understood to be so closely interrelated. Sexuality does not necessarily hold “master status”, and multiple identities need to be considered and viewed through a lens of intersectionality (e.g. how identities such as gender, sexuality, race and ethnicity, social class, age, and so on intersect with each other) (see Diamond & Butterworth, 2008; Hutson, 2010). Multiple and overlapping identities may be difficult to express or recognise through dress and appearance.

The potential for heterosexual recognition of sexuality through the body

Gaydar and the recognition of sexuality

The term “gaydar” (a portmanteau of “gay” and “radar”) has been used within lesbian and gay cultures to refer to the ability to recognise other lesbian and gay people on the basis of (sometimes subtle) visual cues (Barton, 2015). Gaydar has been considered an important form of potential communication, through which lesbian and gay people may be able to identify each other, acknowledge their shared identity, identify romantic partners, and socially interact with one another (e.g. Barton, 2015). Gaydar has also become a language that may (to some extent) be understood by those who are heterosexual. Since the 1980s, researchers have explored whether and how (lesbian, gay, and) straight people might be able to detect sexuality through visual (and vocal) cues (for reviews, see Rule, 2017; for a meta-analysis, see Tskhay & Rule, 2013; for critical reviews, see Gelman, Mattson, & Simpson, 2018; Miller, 2018; Vasilovsky, 2018).

These quantitative studies have tended to be based on various methods of heterosexual (and/or lesbian/gay) participants being shown photographs, videos (silent or with audio), or computer animations of people. They are then asked to identify the “targets” in these sources as “heterosexual” or “homosexual” – sometimes as the main focus of the study, or as part of a wider set of tasks (e.g. Ambady, Hallahan, & Conner, 1999; Berger et al., 1987; Johnson et al., 2007; Shelp, 2003). These studies have tended to consider accurate identification of sexuality as an important topic on the basis of attitudes to, and prejudice and discrimination towards, lesbians and gay men (e.g. Ambady et al., 1999; Johnson et al., 2007; Tskhay & Rule, 2013). Some researchers have concluded that participants are *unable* to accurately

ascertain sexuality any better than by chance (e.g. Berger et al., 1987, although scholars have argued that reanalysis of data from this one early study could result in statistically significant results – see Rule, 2017; Tskhay & Rule, 2013). Others have concluded that people are somewhat able to make (at least partially) accurate judgements of sexuality on the basis of a range of visual cues (e.g. Ambady et al., 1999; Johnson et al., 2007; Shelp, 2003; Tskhay & Rule, 2013). Those who are lesbian or gay, perhaps unsurprisingly, may accurately assess sexuality to a greater extent than heterosexual people (e.g., Ambady et al., 1999; Berger et al., 1987; Shelp, 2003). Most commonly, participants have reportedly made their assessments on the basis of appearance (e.g. choice and fit of clothing, hairstyles, and jewellery), facial shape, facial expression including smiles, eye gaze, gestures, and body posture, shape, and motion (e.g. gait) (e.g. Berger et al., 1987; Johnson et al., 2007; Shelp, 2003; see also Rule, 2017; Tskhay & Rule, 2013).

But what about bidar or pandar?

In some studies, gaydar is defined as an ability “to distinguish between *homosexual and heterosexual people*”, hence the underpinning definition is binary and even when gaydar is more broadly defined as “the ability to detect, judge or perceive *sexual orientation*”, what most studies ask participants to do is choose between two categories of heterosexual or “homosexual” (Miller, 2018, p. 191, emphases added). These narrow conceptualisations of sexuality as binary reflect how bisexuality and pansexuality have been overlooked by researchers (Gelman et al., 2018; Miller, 2018; Vasilovsky, 2018), despite increases in the numbers of people who identify with these and other diverse sexualities, which relate to attraction to more than one gender.

Indeed, the most common approach within gaydar research has been to ignore bisexuality and pansexuality. This has been the case even when “targets” and participants have completed Kinsey scales (or other self-reports of sexuality) that could have enabled researchers to move beyond the binary of straight or gay (see Miller, 2018). For example, in one study, both the “targets” (whose photos and silent video clips were assessed) and the participants (who assessed the photos and videos) were asked to rate themselves on a seven-point Kinsey-type scale in response to the statement “I have homosexual tendencies” (Ambady et al., 1999, p. 541). The authors note that while most “targets” rated themselves at the extreme ends of the scale (and were therefore categorised as heterosexual or “homosexual”), one self-rated as a 4 (e.g. in the middle of the scale). They do not state whether this “target” was excluded from the study or amalgamated with the other “targets” (e.g. categorised as heterosexual or “homosexual”). The participants being asked to assess the sexuality of the “targets” were categorised as heterosexual if they rated themselves as 1–3, or as lesbian or gay if they rated themselves 4–7 (Ambady et al., 1999). Therefore, this study

may feasibly have included “targets” and participants who self-identified as bisexual or with other identities, yet this was not fully taken into consideration, which could arguably have impacted the results (see Miller, 2018). In another example, participants were asked to identify their own sexuality as “gay”, “straight”, or “other”. Those who responded “other” were omitted from the study (Shelp, 2003, p.10). Even in more recent studies, researchers often make no mention of bisexuality or pansexuality, or refer to bisexuality only briefly, sometimes to state their exclusion of bisexual participants (e.g. Cox et al., 2016; see also Miller, 2018).

To date, there are seemingly only two published studies that include bisexuality as an option for participants when assessing sexuality. Ding and Rule (2012, p. 166) investigated whether facial recognition of sexuality extends beyond lesbians and gay men to the “less socially salient category” of bisexuality. They conducted three separate studies. In the first, 60 undergraduate students were asked to view photographs on a computer of 45 gay men, 44 straight men, and 41 men who self-identified as bisexual (or who indicated that they would date men or women). All the men were Caucasian, aged between 18–30 years, with no piercings or facial hair. Participants were asked to categorize these photographs trichotomously, as gay, straight, or bisexual. Participants accurately categorized gay and straight men at a level significantly greater than by chance, but could not do so for bisexual men. In the second study, the same photos were shown to another 33 undergraduate students, who were asked to rate the sexuality of the men in the photographs on a seven-point scale from “definitely gay” through to “definitely straight”. When asked to use this continuum, participants were able to distinguish between straight and gay men and between straight and bisexual men at a rate higher than chance. However, they could not distinguish between gay and bisexual men. In the third study, 40 undergraduate students viewed photos of 40 lesbian, 40 straight, and 40 self-identified bisexual women. While participants were able to distinguish between lesbian and straight women and between bisexual and straight women at a rate higher than chance, this was not the case for distinguishing between bisexual and lesbian women. The authors note that participants’ inability to distinguish between bisexual and gay/lesbian photographs (despite being able to distinguish between bisexual and straight) may arise as a result of participants relying on dominant binary understandings of sexuality (straight/non-straight), even though they were given the option to categorise people as bisexual (Ding & Rule, 2012).

In a related study, Lick, Johnson, and Rule (2015) used some of the same photographs as Ding and Rule (2012). Eighty-three undergraduate students were shown 60 grayscale photographs of straight men, gay men, straight women, lesbian women, bisexual men, and bisexual women (10 of each identity). Again, participants were shown faces of White people aged between 18 and 30 years, with no facial hair or piercings. They were shown each photograph three times and asked to categorise the people in the photographs

as “bisexual” or “not bisexual” and to complete Likert scales of how they rated the faces from “masculine” to “feminine”. Participants correctly assigned those who were not bisexual (e.g. lesbian, gay, or straight) at an above-chance level (59.94 per cent of the time). However, when assigning photographs as bisexual, accuracy levels were no greater than chance (49.58 per cent of the time). Women were more likely to be categorised as bisexual than men. Those assessed by participants as “gender atypical” on the masculinity to femininity measure were more likely to be categorised as bisexual than those assessed as “gender typical” (and this notion of bisexual people being evaluated as “gender atypical” may reflect some of the ways in which bisexual people discuss expressing their identities, as discussed above). The authors conclude that gender cues guide assessments of bisexuality and that participants’ above-chance identification of non-bisexual people was only on the basis of rejecting photographs of lesbian women, gay men, and straight people, rather than correctly identifying bisexual people (Lick et al., 2015). These findings highlight the importance of including bisexuality and raise questions around how or why participants are able to separate bisexual people from straight people, but not from lesbians and gay men (Miller, 2018). Yet very few studies have explicitly included bisexual “targets” in the photographs, videos, or other data-collection tools, or included bisexual people within the groups of participants who assess others’ sexuality, or even taken bisexuality into consideration. To date, it would seem that there has been no inclusion of pansexual or asexual spectrum identities. This tendency towards excluding those attracted to more than one gender as either “targets” or participants may reflect some researchers’ binary understandings of sexuality and contributes to the ongoing erasure and invisibility of bisexual/biromantic and pansexual/panromantic people.

Over the last few years, scholars have critiqued gaydar research and highlighted a myriad of conceptual and methodological limitations. (For in-depth discussions of issues, including selection of stimulus photographs; decontextualized design and ecologically invalid settings; accuracy rates; effect sizes, response biases, and errors, see Cox et al., 2016; Gelman et al., 2018; Miller, 2018). Participants may be assessing sexuality on the basis of stereotypes; therefore, rather than providing evidence for the existence of gaydar, these studies may instead indicate that participants are knowledgeable about (overly simplistic) stereotypes of lesbian and gay people as gender atypical (Cox et al., 2016; Gelman et al., 2018; Miller, 2018). Indeed, a key question has been whether participants are able to identify sexuality, or whether what they are actually assessing is based on gender inversion models – which may further perpetuate their existence and therefore the exclusion of bisexuality and pansexuality (Miller, 2018; Vasilovsky, 2018). Most recently, and most controversially, one study concluded that artificial intelligence can detect lesbian and gay sexuality from facial images (taken from a dating website), which the authors concluded was on the basis of facial shape and features (Wang & Kosinski, 2018; see Gelman et al., 2018

and Miller, 2018 for critical discussion). While dress and appearance have been interpreted within a framework of socially and culturally produced shared meanings, in contrast, many of the findings of gaydar research are often (overly simplistically) reduced to hormonal, genetic, biological explanations of sexuality. These implicitly locate sexuality as inherent, immutable, and universal, which has political implications and may not necessarily be advantageous (see Vasilovsky, 2018).

Qualitative explorations of perceptions of lesbian, gay, and bisexual appearance

Researchers have also explored how heterosexual (and lesbian, gay, and bisexual) people perceive sexuality and appearance using qualitative methods (Hayfield, 2013; Hayfield & Wood, 2018). In one study, 36 (mainly heterosexual) students completed a survey in which the participants were all asked how they would describe what a lesbian woman, gay man, heterosexual woman, heterosexual man, bisexual woman, and bisexual man might look like, and how they might “potentially recognise them from their appearance” (Hayfield, 2013, p. 18). Participants were able to describe effeminate gay men and masculine butch lesbians, with some also referring to femme lesbians. They were also able to describe heterosexual appearance on the basis of traditional and dichotomous notions of gender, as short-haired muscular masculine men and long-haired slim feminine women. They often reported that they saw these images as stereotypes rather than what people really looked like. However, most participants were unable to describe any bisexual appearance. Some explicitly commented that they could not describe a bisexual look or distinguish bisexuality on the basis of appearance. The few participants who did provide descriptions of bisexuality sometimes indicated that bisexual people might look heterosexual or gay/lesbian. Others (including one heterosexual and one bisexual participant) suggested that bisexual people might embrace alternative and Goth looks (Hayfield, 2013). Nonetheless, what dominated was an inability to picture bisexual appearance in contrast to being able to describe (particular versions of) heterosexual and lesbian and gay appearance.

Most recently, Hayfield and Wood (2018) presented 54 (mainly heterosexual student) participants with a hypothetical scenario about a bisexual, lesbian, or heterosexual woman going on a date. They were randomly allocated to one version of this scenario (e.g. a bisexual *or* lesbian *or* heterosexual character) and asked to complete a story about the character’s preparation for the date, how the date went, and what happened afterwards. They then produced a cartoon image (using Bitstrips) of the character in their story. Traditional notions of gender and heterosexuality dominated, and there was little diversity in how the characters were described or depicted. Most were portrayed in keeping with traditional heterosexual femininity – as having long hair, removing body hair, and wearing dresses and makeup.

Only a few participants portrayed their lesbian character in any ways that mirrored lesbian appearance norms and none of the participants assigned to the bisexual character suggested any bisexual appearance. These findings may indicate that participants had little cultural knowledge of lesbian and bisexual cultures to draw upon when writing their stories. Alternatively, the results could reflect that particular looks in relation to sexuality are somewhat diminishing, and therefore are not available for younger people to draw upon – perhaps due to the diversification and/or the assimilation of lesbian and gay identities into mainstream culture (Hayfield & Wood, 2018). On the whole, these studies mirror research with bisexual participants in suggesting that bisexual appearance norms may be few and far between and little recognised by others.

Conclusion

To date, psychologists, sociologists, anthropologists, and others have explored the expression and recognition of lesbian, gay and (to some extent) bisexual appearance within a framework of socially and culturally produced shared meanings. It would seem that some genders and sexualities can potentially be expressed through appearance. In contrast, there are seemingly no known appearance norms or visual scripts that can easily make bisexual and pansexual (or, by extension, biromantic and panromantic) identities visible. Further, multiple and overlapping identities may be particularly challenging to communicate and there may be limited opportunities to express these identities through appearance.

Psychologists and others have also taken a variety of approaches to consider whether heterosexual (and lesbian, gay, and bisexual) participants might recognise sexuality through bodies and appearance. While lesbian and gay identities may be recognisable to some, the dominant picture is of a lack of recognition of bisexuality and pansexuality – which reflects wider bisexual and pansexual invisibility. Some scholars have suggested that the lack of recognition of bisexuality may have consequences for the mental health and wellbeing of bisexual people (see Hayfield et al., 2013; Monro, 2015). This may extend to pansexual identities. Further, lesbian and gay looks may be diminishing and be less dominant than they once were; therefore, it seems unlikely that bodies are sites through which invisibility will become addressed in the future. Nonetheless, it remains important to be aware of the ways in which bodies intersect with gender and sexuality – alongside other aspects of identities – and may therefore be sites of in/validation and in/visibility.

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13 Concluding remarks

Proposing future directions

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Introduction

We would like to round out this collection by asking some questions: What topics might need to be tackled in the future? What are the next steps to be taken? How can we make bisexuality research more relevant within sexuality scholarship and the broader social sciences? Even though there has been a rise in research on bisexuality, much remains to be done. This final chapter can be read as a guide to the directions in which bisexual theorising might head, or as humble suggestions for (young) researchers about which topics still need to be addressed. It may also simply inspire researchers to delve more deeply into the realities of bisexual people.

As we mentioned in the introduction, there are a few topics that have been at the centre of bisexual theorising: discrimination against bisexual people; their invisibility in societies governed by binary understandings of sex, gender, and sexuality; and identity formation and development. This has included research on the formation and expression of identity, such as coming-out processes, disclosure, and living as a bisexual person in heterosexual, lesbian, or gay communities. Focusing on these topics made a lot of sense in early bisexuality research, which aimed for the recognition of bisexuality as a viable identity. It was necessary to point out that bisexual people face binegativity from different communities and are not generally in a privileged position. It was also important to show that binegativity has serious health consequences, to strengthen the argument around the impact of binegativity (Jorm et al. 2002; Ross, Dobinson, & Eady, 2010). Even if we, as editors, think it was a paramount task to create a space where bisexuality research could emphasise the unique situation of bisexual individuals, we also think it is now time to focus on other topics as well, and to move past reparative studies. We must go beyond arguing that bisexuality needs to be studied, and start proving why bisexuality scholarship is important for the advancement of sexuality scholarship, social theory, and health studies. This final chapter aims to provide some guidance on how this might be done.

Embedding bisexuality into theories of sexuality

Bisexuality research to date seems to exist in its own bubble, sometimes loosely tied to disciplines such as sociology, psychology, and anthropology. To strengthen research and knowledge about bisexuality, we think it is necessary to introduce bisexuality into the canon of research on sexuality. A first step is to ground bisexuality research firmly in current theorising about sexuality, including in sociology, psychology, and the geography of sexuality. Reparative studies have already paved the way for the next steps here. Second, bisexuality research should inform sexual theorising. As a minimum requirement, bisexuality should be recognised as a viable sexuality that has its own features and is worthy of consideration, separately from homosexuality and heterosexuality. That means understanding that research on monosexual identities does not suffice to understand the lives of bisexuals, because bisexual people do not merely shift between being homosexual and heterosexual. It also means understanding that the unique position of bisexual people offers different perspectives that can enrich sexual theorising. Third, bisexuality research can profit from different (and clear) theoretical perspectives that go beyond the concepts developed within bisexual theorising to understand the marginalisation of bisexuality and bisexual people. Engaging with wider theories is crucial to show the relevance of bisexuality studies, and will help to further research understandings of the lives of bisexual people and others with plurisexual orientations and identities.

Work on *bisexual citizenship* has advocated a greater understanding of specific issues faced by bisexual individuals, such as the recognition of sexual fluidity (rather than essentialist understandings of sexuality), relationship diversity, and queer approaches to sexuality (e.g. Monro, 2005). Richardson's (2000) typology of sexual citizenship rights could be applied to bisexual individuals to advance discussions of sexual citizenship rights, and could also contribute to larger discussions of liberal, communitarian, and queer perspectives on sexual citizenship. The incorporation of bisexual-specific issues outlined by Monro (2005) has the potential to change citizenship discussions that are still based on mononormative and heteronormative assumptions. Bisexual citizenship, however, is not limited to the relationship between the state and its sexualised citizens, or between society and sexualised individuals; it can also be applied in international and transnational (legal) contexts. An example is Peyghambarzadeh's theoretical work on bisexuality and refugees (see Chapter 2 in this volume). This work offers a good starting point to dig more deeply into the lived experiences of migrants and refugees, which we believe is one of the most crucial topics. In the case of refugees and the politics around "particular social groups" in need of protection, the combination of binegativity, a lack of knowledge in

both the country of origin and the country of arrival, and certain cultural understandings of bisexuality can be deadly.

Additionally, it should be recognised that research on bisexuality can help us to understand the current trend towards *sexual diversification* and the complexity of sexuality (Flanders, 2017; Giddens, 1992; Sigusch, 1998; van Anders, 2015). Recent years have seen a general diversification of sexual and gender identities: fewer people feel comfortable using “heterosexual” as a label for themselves, and more people are identifying between or outside the gender binary (YouGov, 2015). There also seems to be a trend towards the pluralisation of labels for sexualities, and plurisexual labels seem to be on the rise. Some research is already heading in this direction (Flanders et al., 2016; Hayfield, 2020; Chapter 12 in this volume). Such research will show whether pansexuality, sexual fluidity, and other labels are used similarly or differently to bisexuality, whether people using such labels have different life experiences, and so on. The way we live and name sexuality is constantly changing; our research should investigate these dynamics. Thus, it remains interesting to study what *different labels* arise, how people conceptualise them, how people understand this diversification, and how these developments impact people’s everyday realities. In this way, research on bisexuality can inform ongoing debates on major questions in gender and queer studies.

The introduction to this book showed that research to date has dealt extensively with bisexual identity. However, bisexuality does not exist as a stable sexual identity only; people live different aspects of it. Although it may seem easier to conceptualise identity in a stable way, the reality is much more fluid, complex, and sometimes messy. Relatedly, a large proportion of people who, to different degrees, are sexually and/or emotionally attracted to people of more than one sex or gender do not identify as bisexual; they use different sexual identity labels – and not always plurisexual labels. Thus, studies should not only focus on “safe topics” related to bisexual (or plurisexual) identities, but should also investigate orientations, desires, attraction, fantasies, and sexual and romantic behaviour. We can learn from earlier approaches and models – such as the Klein Sexual Orientation Grid, which complicates understandings of sexuality by focusing on exactly these factors – as well as by exploring the practical merit or added value of Van Anders’s recent sexual configuration theory (Klein, 1978; Swan & Habibi, 2018; Van Anders, 2015). Ultimately, our research on bisexuality and plurisexuality can be linked to current theorising on sexualities, and can help to inform future theorising.

There is a long-standing ongoing discussion in LGBTIQ+ activist communities about the labels that are and are not acceptable to use, and the impact of the binary ideas of sex, gender, and sexuality that govern our everyday lives. These questions have not been resolved and are probably not resolvable. Queer theory-informed arguments can inspire us to live with these ambiguities, to use different labels, and to exchange and play

with them, as discussed in the *Journal of Bisexuality* 2009 special issue on bisexuality and queer theory (e.g. Anderlini- D’Onofrio & Alexander, 2009; Barker, Richards, & Bowes-Catton, 2009; Callis, 2009; Erickson-Schroth & Mitchell, 2009; Gustavson, 2009). Bisexual people encounter the binary system of sex, gender, and sexuality on a daily basis, have first-hand experience of the limits of this system and its labels, and can provide additional perspectives and knowledge to deconstruct it. Chapter 10 in this volume, on the erasure of bisexual knowledge, shows that it is vitally important to learn from bisexual people’s experiences in order to further enrich sexuality scholarship on this binary system. Moreover, the question remains of whether bisexuality and the various labels used for plurisexual identities have the potential to change or reinforce binary thinking about sex and gender (e.g. Hemmings (2002) on bisexuality as the middle ground that sustains these binaries). It might also be interesting to further engage with queer theory in order to move towards a postmodern approach to sexuality, researching topics about the complexity, situatedness, and fluidity of sexuality (and gender). Thus, it is not only from an epistemological point of view that it is worth digging into these questions.

Diversification and intersectionality

Our collection shows that most research on bisexuality is still being done about bisexual women (see Chapters 6, 7, 8, 11 and 12 in this volume). This interesting specificity of bisexuality research derives from the fact that the usual gender-discriminatory patterns are reversed in bisexuality. Stereotypes against bisexual women seem to be less pervasive than those against bisexual men. More women identify as bisexual than men (FRA, 2014). Women also seem to be more open about their bisexuality, and hence easier to reach as participants; as a consequence, more research is done on the lived experiences of bisexual women. Bisexual men are still ignored in society and academia. This leaves bisexual men an under-researched group; as Flanders (2017) argues, there is a considerable lack of research on the lives and experiences of bisexual men – that is, men for whom bisexuality is a self-identity, behaviour, and/or attraction – and most such research stems from the last ten years. Thus, researchers on bisexuality should try to include more men, and also to focus on other genders, including people living in between or beyond the gender binary.

Studies are usually conducted on younger, often academic bisexual people who live in urban areas and are part of bisexual or queer activist communities (see Chapter 8 in this volume). It would be important to gather knowledge about bisexual people living in rural areas, those who are not involved in bisexual communities or activism, those who participate in gay and lesbian scenes and those who not, and so on. Of course, that might complicate the recruitment process; however, social media and the internet can be very helpful in the recruitment of bisexual people (e.g. Maliepaard,

2017). Looking for a rather small group, particularly within sexualities, can be hard; however, we have to make the effort to include a more diverse range of bisexual people if we are to discover the variety and heterogeneity of bisexual experience. This will help to broaden our understandings of the complex lived experiences of bisexual individuals. Furthermore, it will open up possibilities to study people who do not necessarily identify as bisexual, but feel sexually and/or romantically attracted to people of more than one sex or gender. Additionally, perhaps a shift towards plurisexual orientations might be furthered in future research.

Aside from gender, there has been little or no research on bisexuality and other social categories, such as race, class, age, disability, and religion – at least in Europe. There has been more research on these categories and their intersection with bisexuality in the United States (Swan & Habibi, 2018). An inspirational 2019 special issue of the *Journal of Bisexuality* on bisexual people of colour and Indigenous people (Gonzalez & Mosley, 2019), which includes work on bisexual people of colour in Italy (Castro & Carnassale, 2019), provides important starting points to further tease out the intersections between having a biracial/bicultural background and bisexuality, and to challenge existing studies that predominantly focus on Caucasian people. Regarding religion, we have already mentioned the recent book by Yip and Toft (2020), which includes chapters on different faith communities; there are also those authors' respective individual articles on bisexual Christians, as well as work by Shepherd on bisexuality and the church.

From a theoretical perspective, an intersectional approach can help us to work at the intersections of different categories such as sexual identity, gender, and race. At the moment, only a small number of studies make any effort to take this perspective into account at all (see Chapter 9 in this volume; Castro & Carnassale, 2019; Gusmano, 2018; Klesse, 2005; Maliepaard, 2018; Monro, 2015; Popova, 2018). However, we contend that the application of intersectionality should go beyond the mere statement that it is an interesting new approach. It is important to theorise the multiple oppressions that bisexual people may face, and intersectionality can be a highly valuable and revealing perspective and method that should be used more often. Valentine's (2007) article on the potential of intersectionality theory for feminist geography – partly based on a case study of a Deaf lesbian woman's multiple experiences of exclusion – is in our opinion an important intervention regarding how intersectionality can be applied in the social sciences. Valentine (2007, p. 18) argues that

its [intersectionality's] appeal lies in the emphasis this approach places on the complexity of and fluidity in the ways that identities are unmade as well as made, and undone as well as done.

It will be important to focus on the specificity of the lived experiences and challenges faced by different bisexual people – beyond their bisexual/

plurisexual identities and orientations, and related to their other social positions. Bisexual people are a heterogeneous group, and it is not just fascinating but also important to acknowledge this in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of their professional, social, sexual, and romantic lives. The first steps would be to identify the social categories that might be crucial for sexualities in general and bisexuality in particular. Focusing on how race, class, disability, age, and religion influence the lives of bisexual people may be a good starting point for this endeavour. For example, it is well known that being Black or coming from a working-class background increases one's risk of being stereotyped as hypersexual (Klesse, 2005, 2011). In contrast, disabled or older people are generally assumed to live their lives without sex (Caldwell, 2010; Johnston, 2016); they may also experience ageism and ableism within LGBTIQ+ communities, and heteronormative and mononormative assumptions and binegativity from their own age groups or in care homes.

Finally, although it is important to move towards a deeper understanding of discrimination against bisexual people, it would be interesting to pinpoint the situations where bisexual people might indeed be privileged, or at least not suffer discrimination based on their sexual identity or orientation. Even though bisexual people do experience hardship, it is possible to move beyond the overarching theme that bisexual people are just victims of binegativity. Studying bisexual people's communities and social support systems, or showing how (bi)sexuality can be empowering, may be a good starting point to explore bisexual agency (Baumgartner, 2017; Heath & Mulligan, 2008; Lahti, 2015; Monro, 2015; see also Chapter 5 in this volume). Furthermore, we think it is time to move towards a more complex understanding of discrimination that works with more shades than just discrimination versus privilege. Intersectional theory might (again) be a good starting point for this endeavour.

Theoretically grounded research

As previously mentioned, we propose that researchers should conduct (more) theoretically grounded research and focus more on existing social theories. Engaging with mainstream social theories will not only help to shift bisexuality research from marginal practices to mainstream social sciences; such theories can also provide tools and approaches to understand and explain different elements of the everyday realities and experiences of bisexual people and others with plurisexual orientations and identities. This is important for our shift of focus from (bi)negativity to the complexity and richness (including the positive aspects) of bisexual and plurisexual lives. Existing social theories can provide deeper and richer insights into the everyday lived experiences of bisexual people – their social lives, sexual lives, romantic lives, working lives, and so on. Theories such as (post-)phenomenology, practice theory, new materialism, and general non-representational

methodologies are just a few that might prove useful for the exploration of bisexual people's lives and loves (see Chapters 3 and 6 in this volume). Phenomenological theories could be used as a basis to explore how bisexual people make sense of their lives – for example, how they experience disclosure and passing – but that would be just a beginning. There is still a lot of work to be done to understand how bisexual people and people with other plurisexual orientations or labels understand the binary system of sex, gender, and sexuality, the importance of identities, historical and current developments in sexual identities, and also the fluidity, stability, and complexity of bisexual desire.

Practice theory might be a positive approach not just to focus on the bisexual subject/individual, but to understand the interactions between the doings, sayings, and agency of individuals and practices – manifold activities, organised by understandings, rules, and teleoaffective structures (Schatzki, 2002). There are numerous questions regarding what constitutes acceptable behaviour, when it is acceptable to express one's bisexual desire, and what place (bi)sexuality occupies in everyday practices. Practice theory embraces practices as the building blocks of social lives, but its added value lies in the interactions between practices (which partially govern people's behaviour and experience) and individual agency (which is a combination of teleological and affective forces, a combination of body and mind) (e.g. Maliepaard, 2017, 2018). Thus, practice theory may be a valuable perspective from which to study bisexual lives and experiences as temporal products of the interactions between individuals and all kinds of practice, such as sexual practices, working practices, family practices, romantic practices, and so on.

Similarly, assemblage theories focus primarily not on the individual, but on the assemblages in which the individual is involved, as the basic unit of analysis. *New materialist approaches*, such as more-than-representational theories and actor-network theories, focus on how life takes shape in assemblages, and in interactions between human and non-human bodies. These approaches might further understandings of bisexuality as a relational identity – and certainly also as desire and behaviour – that emerges in assemblages and is highly dynamic. Chapter 6 in this volume is an example of how assemblage theories can be concretely applied to understand how relationships and the social environments around them have impacts on people's romantic and social lives. Lahti's discussion of bisexual breakups is an important intervention that embraces the complexity and relational aspects of bisexual identities, which do not exist in isolation from social relations and societal understandings, but actually emerge in those assemblages. Such approaches can be helpful to explore the affective and embodied experiences of bisexual people in social environments and mundane encounters of all types, not limited to romantic relationships and friendships.

Other approaches to open researchers' eyes to the complexity of bisexual lives – approaches closely related to symbolic interactionism,

ethnomethodology, and phenomenology – might include life (hi)story approaches, including life course or narrative approaches. These might help us to obtain more nuanced and vivid pictures of the lives of bisexual people, making sure that developments over time find their way into research (see Chapter 11 in this volume). Such studies could also help to start longitudinal research. Applying such approaches to bisexuality research may lead to more nuanced theorisations of sexualities in general, and could make bisexuality and plurisexual orientations, and their complexities and dynamics, more visible (see e.g. Diamond, 2008; Jones, 2019). Ultimately, the more our research is grounded in theory, the greater the impact we can have.

Bisexual health

Interestingly, as we observed in the introduction, bisexuality research in Europe has been predominantly the domain of qualitative researchers, or at least based on qualitative research methods. There have been remarkably few quantitative studies published on the realities of bisexual people – for instance, studies that focus on the mental, sexual, and/or physical health of bisexual subjects. Some studies have been conducted in the United States and Australia, such as the Australian ‘Who I am’ study by Julia Taylor and colleagues (Taylor et al., 2019). We do have some preliminary research on bisexual health in Europe, mostly from the United Kingdom and Sweden (Bränström, 2017; Bränström et al., 2018; Colledge et al., 2015; Hatzenbuehler, Bränström, & Pachankis, 2018). However, the extent to which these studies’ findings can be generalised to all bisexual people is questionable. First, different geographical regions will have different outcomes due to their different laws, policies, sexual cultures, and degrees of bisexual community organisation. Second, focusing only on people who participate in bisexual communities, as some of these studies do, leads to bias in the understanding of bisexual lives, as bisexual communities and groups may serve as support groups for people who cannot find such support elsewhere, and may thus also attract a lot of people who face (social and mental) difficulties (Colledge et al., 2015; see also Chapter 3 in this volume). It is important to recruit participants from outside bisexual communities too, because there are likely to be differences between the experiences of those who identify as bisexual and those who experience bisexual desire but identify differently, or between people who are involved in the bisexual community and people who are not (e.g. Maliepaard, 2017; Toft & Yip, 2018).

We are aware that some research is conducted by *national research organisations* and is not published in peer-reviewed English-language journals. This is the case with studies conducted by Dutch research organisations that for various reasons rarely publish in peer-reviewed journals. However, collaborations with research institutions or universities that carry out large-scale quantitative studies may help us to gain further insight into the health situations of bisexual people, and to differentiate between different types

of experiences and realities – for instance, depending on people’s relationship types (relationship diversity), the sex/gender of their partner(s), and their lifestyles, age groups, community involvements (or lack thereof), and self-identifications (bisexual versus other sexual identities). It is also worthwhile to engage with existing theories, such as minority stress theory, although these may not be entirely applicable to bisexual individuals (Ross et al., 2018).

Generally, it is important to develop further understanding of the possible causes of bisexual people’s mental, sexual, and physical health issues. For example, studies of binegativity should go into more depth and focus on the actual health implications of invisibility, microaggressions experienced in relationships and from different communities, and internalised forms of binegativity. Research on bisexual communities and events, as well as psychological models of minority stress processes, indicate that being in a community or among friends who are truly understanding and supportive may alleviate some of the distress faced by bisexual people (Meyer, 2003; Monro, 2015; Ross et al., 2018). More interaction is also needed between qualitative and quantitative studies. Mixed methods research into the health situations of bisexual people – or better, people with plurisexual orientations – might be profitable to further our understanding of the prevalence of certain health issues, the factors that impact on them, and any correlations found between them. Finally, producing figures on the prevalence and possible causes of health issues would have tremendous power to urge governmental organisations and policy-makers to pay attention to bisexual people, instead of submerging bisexuals within the categories of homosexual or LGBTIQ+. To provide a concrete example: an American study of 750 plurisexual people provides information about their motivations for non-disclosure (or concealment), and the correlations of those motivations with mental health outcomes. This study reveals that interpersonal motivations to not reveal one’s plurisexuality – that is, because of the fear that disclosing one’s sexuality will lead to discrimination and victimisation – are correlated with higher levels of depression and general anxiety, whereas intrapsychic factors – such as not yet being ready to accept one’s own sexuality, or not believing in sexual identity labels – are not correlated with negative mental health outcomes (Feinstein et al., 2020). This and similar studies – for instance, on bisexual people’s mental health – provide evidence for governmental action and policies with regard to people with plurisexual orientations and identities. At the same time, it is important to establish where bisexual people’s sensitivities lie, and in what contexts they are indeed agents of their own lives.

There is still much to be done

While we were putting this volume together, it was a pleasure to see the diversity of research and bisexual theorizing across Europe. It is good to see

that research on bisexuality and plurisexuality is growing and evolving, and we are convinced that this anthology is living proof of the developments and challenges that bisexuality theory faces – and not just in Europe. We encourage researchers and scholars to gather their strengths, to delve more deeply in the lived experiences of bisexual and other plurisexual people, and to proactively engage with existing social theories and sexuality scholarship, in order to bring bisexuality research to a higher level and prove the relevance of bisexuality to these wider social theories and approaches.

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