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Bisexual and Plurisexual Experiences of Sexual Identity, Gender Identity, and Romantic Relationships

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Sexual Renegades: Bisexual and Plurisexual Experiences of Sexual Identity, Gender Identity, and Romantic Relationships

by

Mx. Rosie Nelson

Thesis Submitted to the University of Bristol in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Sociology PhD in the Faculty of Social Sciences and Law

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Abstract

Plurisexuality is the sexual or romantic attraction to more than one gender. Plurisexuals are subject to significant social and institutional oppression due to biphobia. Most of these oppressions are due to the monosexist social structure, which suggests that it is more ‘correct’ or ‘appropriate’ to have a single-gender romantic or sexual attraction.

Plurisexuality is understudied and misunderstood within sexuality scholarship. Scholarship into plurisexuality often fails to adequately theorise the role of gender and the body in plurisexuality. Consequently, this thesis seeks to explore the research question “How do plurisexuals interpret, interact with, and experience identity, the body, and gender in their lives?”

Using a queer theoretical framework informed by understandings of gender and the body, this sociological thesis adopts a qualitative approach to answering this question. Semi-structured interviews, photo diaries, and a thematic analysis were used to explore 30 plurisexual people’s understandings of their sexual identity, gender identity, and relationship experiences.

This thesis argues that there is a chasm between plurisexual people’s lived experiences of desire and the dominant monosexist social ontology. This ontological chasm leads to plurisexuals becoming *Sexual Renegades,* divorced from the normative social order of sexuality and living outside the monosexist order. Although gender is less of a restriction in how participants approach dating, romance, and sex, gender remains critical to lived experiences. This *Gender Ambivalence* means that participants feel that gender is irrelevant and an empty routine in many regards. However, gender expression and gender roles are integral to maintaining social safety and ensuring participants do not face worse discrimination and oppression in their day-to-day life. This study makes a unique contribution to sexualities scholarship by incorporating plurisexual perspectives and thus redressing the currently monosexist academic landscape.

Keywords: bisexual, plurisexual, gender, desire, monosexism, trans, cis, non binary, biphobia

Author's Declaration

I declare that the work in this dissertation was carried out in accordance with the requirements of the University's Regulations and Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes and that it has not been submitted for any other academic award. Except where indicated by specific reference in the text, the work is the candidate's own work. Work done in collaboration with, or with the assistance of, others, is indicated as such. Any views expressed in the dissertation are those of the author.

SIGNED: .... DATE:..........................

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List of Abbreviations

AFAB – Assigned Female at Birth

AMAB – Assigned Male at Birth

BAME – Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic

BBC – British Broadcasting Corporation

BDSM – Bondage, Discipline, Dominance, Submission, Sadism, Masochism

BNP – British National Party

GEO – Government Equalities Office

HRC – Human Rights Campaign

ID - Identity

LG – Lesbian and Gay

LGBT – Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans

LGBTQ+ - Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer, and others

LGT – Lesbian, Gay, Trans

MSM – Men who have sex with men

NHS – National Health Service

ONS – Office of National Statistics

PCOS – Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome

PIL – Pride in London

PoC – Person (or People) of Colour

PTSD – Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

TPOCC – Trans People of Color Coalition

TV - Television

UK – United Kingdom

UKBA – United Kingdom Border Agency

US – United States

USA – United States of America

WSW – Women who have sex with women

Glossary

AFAB – Assigned Female at Birth

AMAB – Assigned Male at Birth

Aromantic – Someone with little to no romantic attraction to others

Asexual – Someone with little to no sexual attraction to others

BDSM – Abbreviation for 'bondage, discipline, sadism, and masochism.' This is indicative of consensual sexual practices related to power, submission, and domination. There could be explorations of inflicting or receiving pain.

Bisexual – Someone with an attraction to more than one gender

Cis – Someone who identifies by the gender that they were assigned at birth

Cisheteronormative – Social dynamic that creates a dominant norm of cis gender heterosexuality

Demisexual – Someone who feels sexual attraction only after getting to know someone

Enby – Shortened version of 'non binary'

Gender binary – Descriptive of a social structure where only two genders (man and woman) are recognised

Intersectionality – The overlapping system of oppressions and discrimination related to different identity categories, including race, disability, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, and religion

Intersex – General term used to describe a person whose anatomy (sexual and/or reproductive) does not fit in with societal understandings of man or woman

Kink – A sex act or relationship dynamic that is considered alternative or boundary-pushing

LGBTQ+ - Acronym for 'Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer +.' An inclusive acronym referencing the diversity of sexual identities

Monogamous – Descriptive of a relationship model where one person chooses to be romantically and/or sexually attracted to one person exclusively

Monosexism – The dominant social norm that establishes monosexual (i.e. single-gender) attractions as superior or more valid than plurisexual identities

Monosexual – A person who is attracted to a single gender (i.e. lesbian, gay, heterosexual)

Non binary – A gender identity outside of the binary system of man and woman. An umbrella term that is indicative of a range of different gender experiences and identities

Nonmonosexual – Someone who is attracted to more than one gender

Plurisexual – Someone who is attracted to more than one gender

Polyamorous – Descriptive of a relationship model that does not follow monogamy. Can involve sex and/or romance with multiple partners

Queer – A term used to reference someone's sexuality or gender as being outside of the dominant norm of heterosexuality. Can mean many things and is very individual

Queer coding – A form of expression (through dress, gesture, discourse) where individuals express their LGBTQ+ sexuality according to insider cultural expectations

Trans – Someone who does not identify with the gender that they were assigned at birth

Introduction

LGBTQ+ scholars and activists alike continue to draw attention to the significant harm that minoritised sexualities and gender identities are experiencing in society. However; they often face an uphill battle due to claims from inside and outside the academy that the LGBTQ+ civil rights movement has won its battles with the legalisation of equal marriage and the institutionalisation of anti-discrimination policies. *The Advocate,* an American LGBTQ+ news source, recently published a comment piece that said:

> [F]or the gay movement to persist in its current mode risks prolonging a culture war that no longer needs to be fought because one side – the gay side – has already prevailed […] For those born into a form of adversity, sometimes the hardest thing to do is admitting that they've won (Kirchick, 2019).

This comment, published in June 2019 on the 50th anniversary of the Stonewall riots, sits prominently in the website dedicated to supporting LGBTQ+ people. Meanwhile, in the same month, the original Stonewall Inn attempted to remove a black trans woman from the bar for disrupting a performance and speaking the names of the black trans women who had been murdered that year (@aspeneberhardt, 2019). A femme couple was beaten whilst taking public transport in London (Mezzofiore, 2019).[1] Istanbul's city governor's office banned a Pride march, and although people still marched, they were tear gassed by the local police force (Mills, 2019). As of 2018, it is still illegal to be gay in 78 countries (Hutt, 2018). A 2018 British Stonewall survey showed that 1 in 4 trans people have been homeless at some point in their lives (Bachmann and Gooch, 2018).

It is clear that to be LGBTQ+ is still a difficult path for many, particularly amplified by intersectional systems of oppression that affect people differently based on other ascribed identities. With this in mind, it is critical to continue LGBTQ+ advocacy, activism and scholarship to benefit LGBTQ+ people and transform oppressive systems and social dynamics to better include those who may continue to be targeted on the basis of their sexual and gender identities.

As such, this thesis seeks to explore the way in which plurisexuals experience gender, sexual identity, and relationships throughout their lives. As this thesis will demonstrate, plurisexuals have

[1] An important addendum may be appropriate here: widely referred to as a 'lesbian couple' by major news outlets globally, one of the femmes involved in the attack identifies as bisexual. She also wrote a response to the global outrage on the attack, citing that this had only caught the attention of the press as she and her partner were white, feminine, cis gender, young, and attractive. She wrote a compelling article discussing the injustices of who gets to be seen in the global fight for LGBT rights, and who is consistently obscured from the discussion. I highly recommend reading it (see: Chris, 2019).

been overlooked, marginalised, delegitimised and erased in many discourses – whether activist or academic – placing them in positions where their identity is omitted, oppressed, or ridiculed. To redress this, this thesis focuses on plurisexual people to centre plurisexual experiences in a sexualities study, counter to most other sexuality studies which omit or generalise the plurisexual experience. Specifically, I focus on the following research question:

- How do plurisexuals interpret, interact with, and experience identity, the body, and gender in their lives?

The following sub-questions elucidate the overarching research question;

- How do plurisexuals interpret and experience their own sexual and gender identities?
- How do plurisexuals' experiences of their own and others' bodies interact with their identities?

The genesis of this thesis lay in my own experiences as a non binary bisexual/queer person who is consistently frustrated with the way people respond to my sexuality. I discuss this further in Chapter 5. I argue throughout this dissertation that plurisexuality must be understood in its own right, not as a variation of lesbian and gay identities.

This thesis adopts an amended queer and feminist qualitative approach to exploring the experience of thirty plurisexual participants. In conducting this research, I adopt an adapted queer theoretical framework that incorporates an attention to identity categories, lived experience, gender, and intersectionality to better understand critical components relevant to a plurisexual identity. This methodological and theoretical intervention better accommodates a study of plurisexuality given the salience of gender, identity categories, lived experience, and intersectionality that are extremely relevant to the population at large.

Thematically, this thesis explores the way in which the cisheteronormative, monosexist social structure impacts upon experiences of plurisexual people. Findings reveal that plurisexuals' navigation of hostile social and institutional systems result in new plurisexual ontologies and epistemologies developed to justify a plurisexual desire against oppression. These plurisexual ontologies and epistemologies indicate that plurisexuals understand sexuality, desire, and gender in ways that go against dominant narratives. As a result, plurisexuals can be interpreted as *Sexual Renegades* who oppose the dominant sexual social order of monosexism and heteronormativity. However, in the context of entering into relationships, gender becomes a salient factor that impacts on relationship models and outcomes due to deeply entrenched social gender dynamics. These elements of plurisexuality coalesce in a broader gender ambivalence for plurisexuals, where gender is both the

most and least important thing for oneself and in a relationship. That is, gender is neither a barrier nor a deterrent, but due to cisheteronormative social expectations, gender can be a dangerous thing to play with, or bend. The structure of the thesis is as follows:

Chapter 1: Plurisexuals in Society

This chapter argues that plurisexuality must be studied and engaged with further in its own right within the sociology of sexualities. Initially exploring the definition of concepts including plurisexuality, biphobia, and monosexism, this chapter continues to highlight the social and institutional location of plurisexuals in contemporary societies. Specifically, this chapter highlights the poor social outcomes for plurisexuals, including increased mental health problems, increased domestic violence rates, increased sexual assault, and generalised erasure and misrecognition across society. This chapter highlights that the poor social outcomes are higher than for heterosexuals, lesbians, and gay men, and consequently plurisexuality must be engaged with to provide better information for policy change and emancipatory research.

Chapter 2: Sexualities Scholarship

This chapter contains a literature review of current sexuality scholarship to highlight the way that plurisexuality has been omitted, vilified, or otherwise mistreated in broader scholarship. Using Monro et al's 2017 chronology of sexuality studies, this chapter unpacks the way in which different schools of sexuality studies including sexology, gay and lesbian studies, queer theory, and LGBTQ+ studies has failed to integrate a decent understanding of plurisexuality into academic theorising. Through omission, denigration, delegitimisation, or biphobia, plurisexual identities have not been understood well in key academic schools of thought concerning sexuality.

Chapter 3: Plurisexual Scholarship

This chapter characterises the literature that has specifically focused on plurisexual identities. I argue that the literature has been important and serviceable in many different ways, both in terms of developing academic theory, and in terms of supporting plurisexuals seeking affirmation through literature. However, I argue that from a sociological perspective, there has not been adequate theorisation of plurisexuality give the absence of core aspects of plurisexuality - specifically, the role of gender, intersectionality, and the body.

Chapter 4: Developing a theoretical framework

This chapter, informed by the absences in the literature reviews and the empirical issues plurisexuals' experience, discusses the theoretical framework used in this study. Informed heavily by Surya Monro's leading work into plurisexuality, this theoretical framework expands on her work to accommodate this study. Specifically, this chapter addresses how to adapt a queer theoretical approach to better serve an understanding of plurisexuality, through emphasising identity categorisations, the body, gender, and intersectionality.

Chapter 5: Methodology

This chapter explores how concepts in the theoretical framework were operationalised to create a queer and feminist methodology. Ethical considerations are discussed, with a significant reflexivity section to illustrate the impact and influence of myself as a researcher in completing this project. I argue that a queer and feminist approach is necessary in the study of plurisexuality, as well as an acknowledgement of my researcher position in conducting and analysing the results.

Chapter 6: Monosexism and Plurisexual Identities

This chapter, the first discussion and results chapter of the PhD, discusses the role of sexual identities for plurisexual people in light of monosexist and homophobic social dynamics. Specifically, this chapter argues that there is an ontological chasm between plurisexual and monosexual understandings of identity. For plurisexuals, this creates an uncomfortable dynamic where they feel like *Sexual Outsiders,* however, if they possess a developed plurisexual ontology and epistemology, they can move into being *Sexual Renegades. Sexual Renegades* are self-accepting in the face of monosexism, biphobia, and hostility.

Chapter 7: Bodies, Futures, and Expectations in Plurisexual Relationships

This chapter presents the results and discussions of plurisexuals interpretation of their romantic and sexual relationships according to notions of embodied gender. This chapter argues that although gender is not a barrier in who a plurisexual might be attracted to, the qualities of a relationship

transforms based on the gender of a partner. This impacts flirting, sex, and potentially the dynamic of the relationship itself. Therefore, gender is a rather formative aspect in a plurisexual relationship.

Chapter 8: Plurisexuality and Gender Ambivalence

This chapter, the final results and discussion chapter of this PhD thesis, interrogates how plurisexuals perceive gender in terms of their own gender identity and expression. I argue that given the development of a plurisexual ontology and epistemology and a *Sexual Renegade* status, gender becomes less important to the individual in terms of their own gender identity. However, equally – and particularly for trans participants – gender performances can be fraught with danger or rejection in public spaces or in other relational contexts. As a result, participants held a gender ambivalence when considering their own sense of gender identity and performance.

Conclusion

This chapter draws together the arguments presented throughout the thesis to discuss the contributions of this thesis and suggest directions for further research. Specifically, I highlight this thesis' contribution to sexuality studies, gender studies, plurisexuality studies, trans and non binary studies, and queer and feminist methodologies. Future research is outlined, highlighting the necessity for a larger intervention into understanding non binary and trans identities in the context of plurisexuality, as well as understanding the voices of those who interact with plurisexuals in relationships – romantic or otherwise.

This thesis redresses the absence and omission of plurisexuality within sociology and sexuality studies thus far. This thesis contributes a new and innovative adapted queer theoretical approach that can be better used to understand complex sexualities that are often doubly-minoritised. This thesis contributes a theoretical understanding of plurisexuality that is absent in current sexualities literature, to better highlight the complex social navigations plurisexuals are forced to make on the basis of monosexism, cisheteronormativity, and biphobia. This thesis is sorely needed as a basis from which to develop further emancipatory research intended to better support plurisexual people in their day to day lives. In the following chapter, I will argue the importance of considering plurisexuals apart from other LGBTQ+ identities, taking into consideration the specific and unique experiences that plurisexuals encounter in their day-to-day navigation of the social world.

Chapter 1: Plurisexuality and its place in the social world

1.0 Defining Plurisexuality

Plurisexual identities involve complex negotiations of sexual expression. In attempting to write this thesis, I have tested numerous terms to attempt to characterise what is – in simple terms – a romantic and/or sexual attraction to more than one gender. The terms I have used in describing these identities have ranged from bisexual, to queer, to nonmonosexual. All of these terms are imperfect – to use bisexual or queer is to obscure the specificity and particular way in which pansexual, heteroflexible, or homoflexible people view their sexual identities. To use nonmonosexual is to define people by what they are not and establishes that they are not the norm. These problems of language in defining sexuality are common in discussions around LGBTQ+ sexualities, particularly amongst those who study multigendered attractions with many scholars emphasising the difficulty of identifying a suitable label in their scholarship (Borver, Gurevich and Mathieson, 2001; Halperin, 2009) and others highlighting the various and inconsistent ways that individuals adopt different label descriptors (Borver, Gurevich and Mathieson, 2001; McCormack, Wignall and Anderson, 2015). I have chosen to consolidate the variety of identities attracted to more than one gender under the term 'plurisexual'. Therefore, when speaking of plurisexuality, I am talking of a sexual and/or romantic attraction to more than one gender – a definition that is itself borrowed from famous bisexual activist Ochs' definition of bisexuality (Ochs, no date). Plurisexuality thus incorporates many sexual identities, including bisexuality, pansexuality, (potentially) queer identities, homoflexible, heteroflexible, biromantic asexuals, omnisexuality, bicuriousity, and the many other iterations of sexual identity that express a multigendered attraction. Importantly, as Ochs writes of bisexuality, plurisexual identities also have the potential to transform over time, with a multigendered attraction occurring "not necessarily at the same time, not necessarily in the same way, and not necessarily to the same degree." (Ochs, no date). The only difference in my choice to use plurisexual as opposed to bisexual is political, to not obscure other multigender-attracted identities.

I have chosen not to obscure the hidden diversity of multigendered attractions by using 'bisexual' primarily due to the fact that many of the participants of my study did not identify as bisexual. In the course of the study, as will be shown later, their relationship with identity labels was important to them, and so using 'bisexual' as a catchall term fails to accommodate the nuances of each participant's sexuality. Further, there is a noted tension between bisexuality and pansexuality in activist discourse, where both identities adopt opposing sides to discuss the inclusivity of their terms for non binary and trans people (For further context, see: Flanders, 2017; Zane, 2018). This debate occurs regardless of the fact that most bisexual and pansexual people define their sexualities similarly and experience similar levels of discrimination or rejection on the basis of their identities (Flanders *et al.*, 2017). To avoid entering into this contentious debate, and to avoid the erasure of other identities,

I have chosen to adopt the term 'plurisexual.' Plurisexual is, I argue, a more inclusive umbrella term to refer to sexual identities attracted to more than one gender. 'Plurisexual' is a recent term, whose popularity has only just began to develop over the past two years, seen in titular work by leading and active plurisexual scholars, most often writing from North American Psychology or Health disciplines (Mitchell, Davis and Galupo, 2015; Ross *et al.*, 2017, 2018; Manley *et al.*, 2018; Flanders *et al.*, 2019). Due to its recent development, the term 'plurisexual' is not commonly recognised. When used in conference presentations, I have experienced blank faces and the need to define it at more length. However, as I was growing increasingly uncomfortable with the use of either 'bisexual' or 'nonmonosexual' due to the respective problems of exclusion and defining oneself by what one is not, I consulted followers on Twitter for their opinion. Active plurisexual scholars engaged with the thread with an interesting debate around the best terminology; some chose to use 'bisexual' as it was the most recognisable identity category for disseminating research results, whilst others chose to be expansive in various ways through using 'bi+,' 'bisexuality and multiple-gender attraction,' 'nonmonosexual,' or 'bisexual, pansexual, queer, and omnisexual identities' (@roropanolo, 2019). The greatest tension with the debate was between respecting individual identities and not eroding differences between sexual identities, and being able to disseminate results effectively and clearly. Frankly, no one was satisfied with their own word choice, however, a few scholars introduced the term 'plurisexual' as an umbrella term, leading me to choose 'plurisexual' as a descriptor (@roropanolo, 2019).

I have chosen to use 'plurisexual' because of its neutral and inclusive character. This is part of a larger theoretical intervention into the field of sexuality studies, as the use of this term necessitates an understanding that there are multiple levels, forces, and strengths of attraction to different genders that lead people to identify with different labels. Through recognising this variety of individual choice in sexual identification, it may be possible to destabilise responses to plurisexuality that suggest bisexuals must be equally attracted to men and women, or that bisexual desire is suppressed when bisexuals are in a relationship and therefore they are straight or gay, and other problematic perceptions that plurisexual people often come across. 'Plurisexual' is based on the understanding that other identities outside of bisexuality exist, which express different romantic and sexual qualities, such as pansexual, queer, WSW, or MSM. The use of this term is intended to avoid stigma-laden interpretations of bisexual/plurisexual people as being half gay/half straight. In essence, I view 'plurisexuality' as a way of escaping tired discourses that limit and denigrate bisexuality, whilst also providing a space for different sexual identities to take a more central focus.

Plurisexuality and sexual identities can be more broadly expressed via desire, behaviour, or identity. We can interpret sexual identity as stemming from unconscious feelings of desire over which

we have little control, or it could be interpreted as based on our sexual encounters and behaviours, or as based on what we choose to call ourselves. These three categories of understanding sexualities do not necessarily follow on from one another. This is evident in men who desire and behave bisexually, but publicly identify as heterosexual due to stigma and discrimination or the pansexual who remains in a monogamous long-term relationship with someone of the same-gender thus only displaying same-gender sexual behaviour. Scholars have demonstrated the inadequacy of identities in explaining sexual behaviour and desire, and the divisions between desire, behaviour, and identity (Klein, 1993; Queen and Schimel, 1997; Diamond, 2003b; Walton, Lykins and Bhullar, 2016). Trying to align desire, behaviour, and identity in the categorisation of sexualities is a project that is doomed to fail, as summarised in this quote:

> The concept of sexual orientation, which itself is a hodgepodge of different elements, is applied to people as though it has some inherent meaning […] what is being called sexual orientation is, in fact, a set of multiply determined individual, interpersonal, and cultural phenomena that are derived from a wide and diverse range of biological features, personal histories, and cultural forces. Simplistic and reductionistic efforts to explain something as variable and complex as sexuality and relationality – whether they be based in biology, in families, or in any other single factor – do a disservice to us all and will never provide sufficient explanation (Stein 1997, p.83-84).

Stein suggests that categories of sexual orientations inevitably limit identities; thus, not capturing the breadth of sexual desire and behaviour that extend outside and beyond a demarcated sexual identity label. I agree to the extent that I believe that sexuality is constantly shifting, and identity labels are temporally and contextually salient in different ways across time and space for individuals and societies. However, if we are to attempt to study individuals' understandings of their identities, it is necessary to use sexual identity given that this is how individuals locate themselves socially. To borrow from queer theorist Eve Kosofksy Sedgwick, (2008) we should not be asking where sexual attraction comes from, but rather, we should be asking whose lives are being affected on the basis of their sexual identities, and how? One way of considering this question is through looking at the ways in which people navigate and manage their sexual identities.

For the purposes of this thesis, I am choosing to focus on identity as the key component of defining plurisexuality. Sexual identity is a way of situating oneself in relation to others and is important in navigating and interpreting social situations and expectations around sexuality, dating, family, and desire. I am interested in those who identify as plurisexual, as they have situated themselves in relation to others, and see their sexualities and behaviours as different to other people

who may identify as heterosexual or gay/lesbian. As this thesis will demonstrate, chosen identities and the consequential ways of relating to others affects large swathes of our lives. Thus, through approaching the study of plurisexuality with an identity-based approach, it is possible to explore the impact of identities and relations on individuals' experiences throughout their lives. In choosing a sexual identity, individuals create a categorisation for themselves which necessarily connects and distances them from other identities.

1.1 Plurisexuality: A Social Overview

The question of why plurisexuality must be studied in isolation from lesbian and gay identities is worth considering. In the United Kingdom, the number of plurisexual-identifying individuals is on the rise, particularly amongst young people. The Office of National Statistics found that the majority of non-heterosexual young people identify as bisexual with 2.3% of 16-24 year olds identifying as bisexual, whilst 1.9% identify as gay or lesbian (ONS, 2019). This statistic contrasts with older age groups, where a lower frequency of bisexual-identifying people is found with the 65+ age group showing 0.3% of people identifying as bisexual versus 0.4% of people identifying as gay or lesbian (ONS, 2019). Similar studies have found that 43% of British 18-24 year olds identify as not exclusively gay or exclusively heterosexual (Dahlgreen, 2015). The reason for the difference between ONS statistics and Dahlgreen's statistics is likely due to the Dahlgreen study not needing to people to identify by a label, but rather simply as 'not heterosexual' or 'not gay/lesbian'. The ambiguity implicit in this is likely appealing to many people who may not be comfortable adopting a definitive identity due to a need to explore their sexuality further. The largest study completed in the United Kingdom into LGBTQ+ experiences showed that 31% of respondents identified as plurisexual in some way (inclusive of those who identify as queer), with 39% of those under the age of 35 in the study identifying as plurisexual compared to 14% of those aged over 35 (GEO, 2018).

Although there are increasing amounts of plurisexuals in younger generations, and people are often choosing not to define themselves by 'heterosexual' or 'gay/lesbian', plurisexuals are subject to poor health and wellbeing outcomes in their everyday lives. This is seen in the poor health and violence statistics for plurisexual identities when compared to other sexual identities. Numerous large scale international studies have demonstrated the significant disadvantage plurisexual people experience in terms of mental health and experiences of violence:

- 46% of US bisexual women have been raped (vs. 17% of heterosexual women and 13% of lesbians) (Walters, Chen and Breiding, 2013)
- 40% of US gay men and 47% of bisexual men have experienced sexual violence other than rape, compared to 21% of heterosexual men (Walters, Chen and Breiding, 2013)

- 60% of UK bisexual women have felt that life was not worth living at some point in their lives (compared to 54% for lesbians) (Colledge *et al.*, 2015)
- 29% of UK bisexual women have self-harmed in the last year (compared to 18% of lesbians) (Colledge *et al.*, 2015)
- 31% of UK bisexual women have had eating problems during their lives (compared to 19% of lesbians) (Colledge *et al.*, 2015)

The studies above are well conducted with large samples and good sampling strategies, however, importantly neither survey discusses a free response segment within the disseminated questionnaires. Further, Colledge et al.'s study involves only cis and trans women, and does not speak to cis or trans men's experiences, or non binary people's experiences. Although these limitations apply, it is clear that a plurisexual identity results in significantly worse outcomes as regards mental and physical wellbeing. Given that health is often tied to a variety of social indicators (Dobinson *et al.*, 2005; McDermott, Roen and Scourfield, 2008; Ebin, 2012), and based on the conclusions from the authors conducting the above studies and others (Jorm *et al.*, 2002; Walters, Chen and Breiding, 2013; Colledge *et al.*, 2015), it is clear that monosexism and biphobia and other forms of social harm contribute to the social and mental outcomes impacting plurisexuals.

In addition to the personal impact of poor social and health outcomes, plurisexuality can also directly affect personal safety and one's navigation of the world. One indicative example is in the way that plurisexual asylum seekers are regularly refused asylum in ways that are specific to the construction of their sexuality. See and Hunt have described how this is primarily due to the ignorance of UK Border Agency officials and judges (See and Hunt, 2011). Specifically:

> [The] failure to grasp the centrality of identity to the persecution people may experience impacts most negatively on bisexual asylum seekers. Viewing sexual orientation purely in terms of sexual acts exposes bisexual people in particular to charges of inconsistency and duplicity. UKBA officials are trained to spot inconsistencies in the stories of asylum seekers, which combined with the poor understanding of sexual orientation existing within the UKBA, places bisexual asylum seekers unfairly at risk of having their claims dismissed as inconsistent or untruthful (See and Hunt 2011, p.295).

See and Hunt further describe the dynamics of the asylum system in relation to plurisexuality, writing that UK border agents often perceive sexuality as a choice that can be redirected (2011). This results in situations such as the following:

> Asylum seekers who have had heterosexual relationships in the past are particularly vulnerable to having their claim dismissed on the basis that they can return to their country of origin and be 'discreet' about their sexual orientation, or repress their 'gay side,' and only 'act upon' their 'straight side' (See and Hunt 2011, p.296).

Given this, See and Hunt describe how many plurisexual asylum seekers may attempt to hide any previous differently gendered relationships, thus "compromising their credibility, and feeding into the vicious cycle of inconsistency and disbelief" (See and Hunt, 2011, p.296). In this context, not only are plurisexuals at risk of being denied asylum on the basis of UK border agents not understanding the implications of holding a plurisexual identity, but many asylum seekers may also have to use terminology (i.e. bisexual) that is culturally bound and not applicable to their own experience or understanding of their sexual identities and behaviours (See and Hunt, 2011).

The social stigma related to plurisexuality also contributes to the poor mental and physical health outcomes for plurisexuals. Plurisexuals are regularly seen as greedy, as 'in a phase', as carrying multiple STDs, as adulterous, and as hypersexual (Knous, 2006; Beaber, 2008; McLean, 2008; See and Hunt, 2011; Callis, 2013; Colledge *et al.*, 2015; Roberts, Horne and Hoyt, 2015; Feinstein *et al.*, 2016; Johnson, 2016; Hayfield, Campbell and Reed, 2018). These stigmas are indicative of dominant social monosexism which creates a social dynamic exclusionary to plurisexual identities. In a monosexist social current, monosexual identities – those which have a unidirectional attraction to one gender, such as heterosexuals, gay men, or lesbians – are presented as more valid, real, or appropriate than plurisexual identities (Eisner, 2013). In a monosexist environment, plurisexuals may find acceptance if they are perceived as being a monosexual gay or heterosexual person when in a relationship, but their plurisexual identity will often be denied. Monosexist perceptions of plurisexuality as a phase can be seen in heterosexual, gay, and lesbian discourses and spaces, meaning that plurisexuals are vulnerable to much criticism. Monosexist ideologies perceive plurisexual behaviour as existing between two binary options of same-gender behaviour, or different-gender behaviour. In this case, plurisexuality is perceived to be a transition, confusion, or lies in a monosexist dichotomy. However, where plurisexuality is accepted, a second possibility emerges for how plurisexuals are perceived in a monosexist dynamic. In these instances, plurisexuals are perceived as problematic and are stigmatised as hypersexual, cheaters, or spreading STDs. In addition to monosexism, plurisexuals will, at points in their lives, simultaneously experience heteronormativity, and homophobia.

Plurisexuals have been constructed as problematic in various ways in both LGBTQ+ and heterosexual discourses. Queen's personal account of her experience with monosexist lesbian

feminist movements highlighted how lesbian feminists portrayed bisexual women as traitors, resulting in many bisexuals passing as lesbian to avoid the ire of the movement (Queen, 2002). Bisexual men were seen as responsible for the proliferation of AIDs into heterosexual communities in the 1980s (BBC, 2016). Freud suggested that bisexuality was a primordial state of sexuality that one would mature out of to form a monosexual identity (Freud, 2011). Alarie and Gaudet found that cis women are often expected to perform bisexuality to be seen as 'cool,' "helping them in their heterosexual quest for men's attention" (Alarie and Gaudet, 2013, p.202). The performances Alarie and Gaudet detail do not help plurisexual women, who are then seen as performing their sexuality for the titillation of men (2013). The variety of ways in which plurisexuals have been excluded from heterosexual, lesbian, and gay communities continues to this day, with plurisexual people reporting significant levels of harassment, exclusion, or biphobia amongst those who are not plurisexual (Weiss, 2003; McLean, 2008; Callis, 2013; Roberts, Horne and Hoyt, 2015). Given that the LGBTQ+ movement posits itself as a place to celebrate sexual freedom and expression outside of a heterosexual, monogamous, and sometimes 'vanilla' norm, it would seem that plurisexuals would find sympathetic allies amongst LGBTQ+ people and in LGBTQ+ spaces. However, Lingel suggested that plurisexuals pass as gay or heterosexual to be accepted by different audiences and occupy an epistemologically and ontologically challenging sexual identity that is inevitably misunderstood or overshadowed (Lingel, 2009). McLean also found that plurisexuals chose to pass in LGBTQ+ spaces for fear of rejection, and that many openly plurisexual people had experienced harassment, or chosen not to engage with LGBTQ+ communities due to antibisexual attitudes (McLean, 2008). Roberts et al. also found that biphobic and monosexist attitudes persisted in heterosexual and LGBTQ+ communities (Roberts, Horne and Hoyt, 2015). Many biphobic and monosexist attitudes persist in LGBTQ+ spaces, and plurisexuals generally lament the lack of community that they themselves experience due to structural and social monosexism, even from within LGBTQ+ spaces and groups (Rust, 2000; Weiss, 2003; McLean, 2008; Turner, 2015).

Beyond the social sphere, institutions such as the media also fail plurisexual people. Plurisexual representation in the mainstream media often falls into negative tropes, with a recent GLAAD report writing that harmful media tropes of plurisexuality include:

- "depictions of bisexual+ characters using sex solely as a means of manipulation or transaction and never out of real feelings or desire" (GLAAD Media Institute, 2018; p.26).
- "treating a character's attraction to more than one gender as a temporary plot device" (GLAAD Media Institute, 2018; p.26).
- "depicting bisexual+ characters as inherently untrustworthy, psychotically obsessive, or lacking a sense of morality" (GLAAD Media Institute, 2018; p.26).

These tropes are clearly harmful for a plurisexual viewer's perception of their own identity, and as the report itself suggests, will impact on whether or not plurisexual people choose to disclose their identities to families and friends (GLAAD Media Institute, 2018). Plurisexuals are broadly critical of representations of multigendered attractions in the media given the recurrence of similar tropes, with many scholars illustrating the poor representation of plurisexuality, or the absence of plurisexual representation entirely (Alexander, 2007; Barker *et al.*, 2008; Johnson, 2016; Magrath, Cleland and Anderson, 2017). Examples of poor representations of plurisexuality are not too difficult to find. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* had Willow, a character who went from a long term loving relationship with a man to a long term loving relationship with a woman; this was not seen as plurisexuality, but rather a suppressed lesbianism that emerged over the course of the series. The portrayal of Willow and dismissal of her relationship with her ex-boyfriend echoed perceptions of plurisexuality as a phase. Similarly, *The L Word* - as one of the earliest and most famous representations of LGBT women – is littered with biphobic jokes and bisexuals who are represented as 'crazy', 'indecisive', or 'gross'. More contemporary media pieces – of which it is difficult to pick only one – regularly depict women engaging in plurisexual behaviour (typically a one-night stand between three women or a man/woman/woman threesome) to emphasise their hedonism, hypersexuality, or sexual debauchery. These same plurisexually behaving women will often be depicted as entering into more 'serious' relationships with cis men. However, since the beginning of even this PhD project, a number of positive representations of plurisexuality have begun to emerge within mainstream media. Specific examples include Rosa Diaz of *Brooklyn 99* whose character arc included a sensitive portrayal of disclosing her bisexuality, and Eleanor Shellstrop of *The Good Place* whose clearly apparent plurisexual desires are discussed and normalised at length throughout the show. These characters are indicative of a much-needed growing positive representation of plurisexuality that can begin to both represent the growing plurisexual population and combat the otherwise broadly negative depictions of plurisexuality most commonly seen in the media. Notably, plurisexual men are conspicuously absent in media representations. Of course, as Travis Alabanza argues, "we can no longer accept LGBTQ solidarity that stops at a TV screen, stage, or meme" (Alabanza, 2019). In this, Alabanza is referring to the commodification of queerness that is used for popular entertainment, such as in shows like *Ru Paul's Drag Race*, whilst the lived reality for trans and non binary people is full of violent hatred, with increasing amounts of hate crimes being reported across all LGBTQ+ identities (Alabanza, 2019). This same concern can be said for plurisexual representation; it is not enough to simply show good images of plurisexual people without meaningfully engaging in ways to alleviate the social stigma associated with plurisexuality.

It is apparent that monosexist thought reproduces hierarchies on the 'right' way to do sexuality and reproduces stigma around those who identify as plurisexual. Plurisexuals have to

navigate their sexual identities in a world generally hostile to their existence, which results in poor social and health outcomes for plurisexual people. Although this is true for many sexual and gender expressions, it is apparent that the plurisexual navigation is distinct based on the construction of a social understanding of plurisexuality. This thesis intervenes in this discussion to emphasise the unique experience of plurisexuals and highlight the ways plurisexuals navigate sexual and gendered landscapes. Further, this thesis introduces a new perspective in academic and activist movements to transform the field of sexuality and gender, and make plurisexual lives more livable, recognisable, and visible in mainstream culture.

1.2 Adopting a Sociological Approach

With these questions in mind, it is important to justify what approach may be best in understanding plurisexuality. I argue that it is pertinent to take a sociological approach. Sociology offers a way to transpose personal troubles into public issues. The concern of studying the place of individuals in relation to social or power structures has been at the core of sociology since its genesis in the nineteenth century. Specifically, although different approaches are common within sociology, what remains central is the "collective concern for *understanding* the relationship between the person and his or her society" (Goodwin, 1997, p.24). In this sense sociology often involves the adoption of a *sociological imagination,* that is, the understanding that:

> each of us can understand our own experiences and our own sense of meaning only by first locating ourselves within society and then by becoming aware of other individuals in the same societal and/or historical circumstances (Goodwin, 1997, p.26).

This sociological approach allows for an emancipatory understanding of the relationship between an individual and external forces. This is helpful when attempting to understand the position of minoritised identities, such as plurisexuals, as a sociological approach enables the assessment of how individuals relate and navigate to overarching structures of sexuality. This in turn allows for an assessment of domination, subordination, and oppression. As opposed to focusing on the relationship between defined structures and agency, this thesis takes an adapted queer theoretical approach to assess the relationship between individuals and dominant power relations that dictate appropriate sexual expressions, as will be further defined in Chapter 4.

In terms of specifically studying sexuality, a sociological approach can offer understandings of dominant and subordinate sexual expressions. As Plummer wrote in his ground-breaking text, *Telling*

Sexual Stories, sexuality is an individual experience that links to a wider social context. In describing a variety of sexual stories, Plummer wrote that these stories:

> must be seen to be socially produced in social contexts by embodied concrete people experiencing the thoughts and feelings of everyday life. I will stress frequently how these stories are found in a stream of power – of opening and closing choices, constraints and controls […] I will argue that personal sexual stories are everywhere, and they make a difference: a difference to our lives, our communities, our cultures, our politics (Plummer, 1997, p.16).

I agree with Plummer's depiction of sexuality existing within various social structures that limit, constrain, or encourage certain forms of expression. In the context of plurisexuality, these limiting social structures include monosexism, cisheteronormativity, and homonormativity. In attempting to understand plurisexuality, which relates to an internalised understanding of one's sexual desires, understanding the self is critical. Green continues these thoughts:

> [T]he study of subjectivities and selves is […] the territory of sociology […] For this latter project requires not only sociological epistemological and methodological tools for capturing a self, but an historical orientation to the late modern individual for whom the development of a socially intelligible identity may be paramount. (Green, 2007, p.42).

In essence, adopting a sociological approach and a sociological imagination allows for the exploration of the relation between the individual's story and experience and their structural and societal environment. Through the recognition of these connections, it is possible to develop research that can have an emancipatory focus, which is an approach much needed in exploring plurisexuality, as I will highlight throughout this thesis given the poor mental and physical outcomes for plurisexuals. Additionally, given that heteronormativity persists in contemporary society, plurisexuals are forced to engage with categorisations of their sexuality to demonstrate how it differs from a dominant normative expression (i.e. heterosexuality). As a result, interpreting the relationship between plurisexual individuals and overarching power relations is critical.

The next two chapters will explore how plurisexuality has been engaged with in sexuality scholarship, and more specifically, plurisexual scholarship, and I shall demonstrate the importance of my intervention through highlighting the omission of plurisexual identities through much of sexuality

scholarship. Further, I will highlight the way that plurisexual studies has failed to accommodate a nuanced representation of the plurisexual that is grounded in everyday life experience.

Chapter 2: Sexuality Scholarship's Engagement with Plurisexuality

2.0 Sexualities Scholarship: An Overview

Academics - as participants in society - are also often subject to monosexist thought, resulting in plurisexuality being understudied - as argued by Monro et al. (Monro, Hines and Osborne, 2017). As will be discussed, various emergent fields of thought in sexuality scholarship have often obscured plurisexual identities because they have tended to incorporate these identities into a larger LGBTQ+ study or theoretical model. In this chapter, I will argue that the inclusion of plurisexuality within the larger focus of LGBTQ+ identities is not actual inclusion but is rather occlusion or erasure. I will show that this is often due to the fact that plurisexual people's sexualities are only taken into account when they are engaged in same-gender acts in the context of an LGBTQ+ study. I will demonstrate the inadequacy of this approach in sexuality scholarship. However, I will also highlight how the queer theoretical turn has mediated the influence of these monosexist starting points to a limited degree through its deconstructive and anti-identarian position. I argue that the impact of this queer turn has been limited by a lack of a thorough-going critique of monosexism within queer theory.

To explore these claims, and to emphasise the importance of plurisexual specific theory and studies, I will expand on Monro et al.'s characterisation of sexuality scholarship through providing explicit examples of the dynamics that they highlight in their excellent article *'Is Bisexuality Invisible: A Review of Sexualities Scholarship 1970-2015'* and building on the critiques that they develop in relation to each school of thought (Monro, Hines and Osborne, 2017). Throughout the delineation of schools of thought, I will reflect on the implicit or explicit assumptions, which have excluded or underestimated plurisexual identities. Monro et al. describe four broad chronological trends within sexualities scholarship, characterised chronologically as the medical-psychoanalytic approach, Lesbian and Gay studies, Queer Theory, and LGBTQ+ studies (Monro, Hines and Osborne, 2017). Each emerging trend developed sometimes in parallel with others and shared information, particularly in the latter half of the twentieth century. I will briefly chart each school of thought, focusing on the inclusion or exclusion of plurisexuality in key writings.

2.1 The Invention of Sexology: Forming a 'Healthy' Sexuality.

Monro et al. highlight psychoanalytic and behavioural scholarship in the 1970s, however, in discussing this school of thought it is helpful to expand the category to encompass the earliest work into sexualities. Emerging at a time of great uncertainty alongside nationalism, colonialism, Darwinism, capitalism, and industry, sexology attempted to understand and categorise physical and emotional difference in a rapidly changing world (Foucault, 1990; Eaklor, 2011). In the mid nineteenth to twentieth century thinkers such as Krafft-Ebbing, Freud, and Kinsey developed a masculinist interpretation of human sexual behaviour (Freud, 2011; Krafft-Ebbing, 2011). Early sexologists held a

series of assumptions and key ideas that formed the basis of their work. Seidman characterises these as:

- "sexology claims that humans are born with a sexual nature, and that sexuality is part of the biological and genetic makeup of all individuals" (Seidman, 2015, p.3)
- "sexology views sexuality as being at the core of what it means to be human […] Humans are fundamentally sexual beings" (Seidman, 2015, p.4)
- "sexology views sexuality as a driving force in human behaviour" (Seidman, 2015, p.4)
- "sexology states that the sexual instinct is by nature heterosexual" (Seidman, 2015, p.4)

In essence then, sexologists began from a base of knowledge that conflated a healthy human with a healthy (heterosexual, active) sex life. Immediately, this alienated anyone LGBTQ+ and also asexuals who often do not feel that sexual attraction plays an important role in their interests.

Early sexologists did not separate sexuality and gender, conflating both and rooting them in biology. In this sense, a male brain was sexually attracted to women, and a female brain was sexually attracted to men. Those who were gay or lesbian were considered to be 'inverts', that is, their bodies did not match their brains. Krafft-Ebbing, a German sexologist, made case studies of individuals' sexual lives in *Psychopathia Sexualis* and identified plurisexuals, referring to them as 'psychical hermaphrodites', as they illustrated that "in one and the same human being, be it man or woman, the inverted as well as the normal direction of sexual life may be combined" (Krafft-Ebbing 2011, p.266). Krafft-Ebbing saw inverts and psychical hermaphrodites as being tainted, although innocent of blame for their sexual desires. Freud's *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (2011) theorised plurisexuality. Throughout his essays, Freud, like Krafft-Ebbing, conflated sex and gender, referring to lesbian and gay people as 'inverts'. Freud situated bisexuality as an amalgamation of man and woman and as the early immature stage of one's sexual development. (Freud, 2011). In Freud's view, having adult plurisexual desires was related to one's upbringing and mixed gender and was interpreted as a stage of immaturity in one's psychosexual development, which one should mature out of – either 'healthily' into a heterosexual, or 'unhealthily' into a 'homosexual'.[2] The critical element in understanding these early sexologists' work is appreciating that they worked with visions of an ideal and healthy sexuality in mind. Seidman suggests that for sexologists this ideal sexuality was (usually) monogamous, reproductive, heterosexual, orthodox, and regularly occurring (Seidman, 2015). Given that any alternative models of sexuality or desire were branded deviant, it is perhaps unsurprising that the early sexologists' work has not been overly helpful in interpreting LGBTQ+ sexual identities as

[2] Homosexual used here in sexology terms is an increasingly unpopular term amongst LGBTQ+ people given the term's history, which is rooted in the pathologisation of same-sex behavior.

arbitrary, commonplace, or incidental as opposed to stemming from issues in psychosexual development. Although the majority of theorists did not necessarily recommend conversion therapy (See: Freud, 2003), the implicit hierarchy of healthy sexualities is an unhelpful beginning for LGBTQ+ emancipation.

In the 1940s and 1950s, Alfred Kinsey became one of the most influential behavioural sexologists to emphasise the incidence of plurisexual behaviour through his development of the Kinsey Scale, a tool designed to demonstrate fluidity in sexual behaviour. Kinsey emphasised sexual incidences and fantasies throughout his work. Following detailed interviews with 5300 white men and 5940 white women, Kinsey found that "46 percent of the men and up to 14 percent of the women "reacted to" both men and women in a sexual way, and 37 percent of the men and 13 percent of the women reported same-sex activity to orgasm" (Eaklor 2011, p.80).[3] As encouraging as these statistics may appear for the plurisexual scholar, it is crucial to note that Kinsey was interested in individual behaviour, not in social identities. Consequently, although sexual diversity amongst the American population was studied, Kinsey did not draw significant conclusions around how people identified and how social norms worked to reiterate, inform, and redress these sexual identities. Furthermore, Kinsey did not explicitly theorise about social influences or processes of identity-construction in sexual identities. By studying plurisexual behaviour as opposed to plurisexual identities, Kinsey's work suggested that a significant proportion of the population had a plurisexual attraction. However, by suggesting the commonality of this behaviour without drawing on the implications of identifying as plurisexual, Kinsey's work ultimately invisibilises plurisexuality, as plurisexuality becomes the 'middle-ground' that heterosexual and gay/lesbian people stray into, as opposed to a consolidated identity of its own. Monro et al. elaborated on these critiques in discussing Klein's work in the late 1970s as being largely individualist in nature. That is:

> fluidity of desire across and between gender categories was highlighted to exemplify individual sexual diversity, although the social norms, values, and structures that enable or disable sexual agency remain un-theorised in this body of work (Monro et al, 2017, p.670).

Broadly, the field of sexology, which was mostly psycho-biological in nature, focused on individual experience as opposed to reflecting sociologically on structures which affect sexuality. The conflation

[3] It is possible the significant distinction between men and women here relates to the 1940s-1950s expectation that women remained in the private sphere of the home, thus limiting opportunity and networks.

of sex and gender in early theorists' work, as well as the notion of what constitutes a 'healthy' sexuality mean that these works can only take us to a limited place in a sociological study of plurisexuality. Furthermore, the intervention Kinsey delivered, which celebrated the diversity and multiplicity of sexual behaviour is also of limited use for the purpose of this study given that he did not debate sexual agency, identity, or normalisation. In essence, plurisexual identities were not adequately represented or theorised by sexologists, given either the emphasis on 'healthy' sexuality, or the disregard for how individuals developed and responded to sexual identities.

2.2 Gay and Lesbian Studies: Politicising Same-Gender Sex

In the 1960s and 1970s, the USA saw a number of civil rights movements based around identities. This period, marked by developments of collective consciousness and identities, witnessed feminist and sexuality civil rights movements that greatly influenced the development of scholarship across disciplines including history, women's studies, cultural studies, literary studies, and sociology to name but a few. Monro et al. characterise the 1970s and 1980s as a rich period of emergent sexualities scholarship through lesbian feminist theory and gay studies (2017). In this period, the institutionalisation of gay and lesbian theory saw key thinkers emerging such as Adrienne Rich, David Halperin, and John Boswell (Rich, 1980; Halperin, 2003, 2009; Boswell, 2005).

Adrienne Rich's 1980 essay *Compulsory Heterosexuality and the Lesbian Existence*, is a cornerstone of Lesbian and Gay studies. Rich introduced the notion of heteronormativity and a heteropatriarchy, concepts which suggested that women are forced to adopt heterosexuality as opposed to embracing an innate lesbianism (Rich, 1980). This text is indicative of lesbian feminist thinking in that it reinforces a gay/heterosexual binary, where plurisexuality is in many ways portrayed as impossible or illusory. In Rich's thought, any heterosexual act by women was due to external patriarchal pressure and was not 'natural' to women's innate lesbianism. In this sense, plurisexual women were interpreted as either not having reached an enlightened consciousness that shook off the patriarchy, or as traitors to the lesbian feminist movement. The political activist implications of this were extensive, with this strain of thought becoming dominant in activist leading circles, leading to the alienation of plurisexual women from lesbian feminist groups. Queen describes instances of being pushed out of lesbian feminism, referring to her shared understanding of the bisexual experience:

> To one degree or another we all share fear of rejection by the lesbian community we claimed as our home; many of us also share actual rejection, hurtful experiences of name-calling and shunning (Queen, 2002, p.27).

Queen highlights her experiences of both biphobia and sex worker exclusion within lesbian feminist circles throughout her text *Real Live Nude Girl* (2007). These experiences often stem from thoughts similar to Rich's theory of compulsory heterosexuality, where plurisexuality is seen as traitorous or as having been patriarchally brainwashed to still relate to men in a sexual and romantic way.

John Boswell's 1980 *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century* sought to show that gay people have existed throughout history, with various instances of same-gender activity in culture and religion. Published in 1980 and a key contribution to Lesbian and Gay studies, Boswell's text uncritically adopts the term gay to describe historical individuals, failing to acknowledge the specificity and context of the term homosexual as a 19th century development. Bisexual erasure is written into his text quite overtly in sections where he describes that:

> it appears that even in these [modern industrial] cultures a significant proportion of gay people – possibly a majority – do marry and have children […] most of the gay people discussed in the present study were married and had children (Boswell 2005, p.10).

Through uncritically applying gay identities historically, Boswell reinforces the binary division between heterosexuality and gay/lesbian identities which is characteristic in Lesbian and Gay sexuality studies. Consequently, the possibility of plurisexual desire, behaviour, or identity are erased.

Monro et al. highlight how Lesbian and Gay studies are characterised by an interactionist approach, which posits social forces and power relations as determining individuals' sexual identities, whilst simultaneously claiming an essential biological condition of sexual orientation (2017). Furthermore, Monro et al. highlight Lesbian and Gay studies' emancipatory aim of justifying lesbian/gay sexual orientations whilst also building a shared history meaning that much of the literature is loaded with (often politically strategic) biases that limit critical thinking into what various sexual identities meant. In fact:

> lesbians, gays, and heterosexuals have an epistemic interest in overlooking bisexuality, in order to maintain stable heterosexual/homosexual binaries and gender binaries as an ontological basis for erotic relations, also reinscribing mononormativity (the notion that people have unidirectional desires) (Monro et al. 2017, p.11).

Often, sexual identities are conceived of as fixed and static, innate to the individual, and either gay or heterosexual. Plurisexuality was often strategically left out of the field of analysis as it was seen to weaken arguments surrounding gay/lesbian essentialist identities. Furthermore, Gay and Lesbian studies often reinscribe homonormative ideals or models, which attempt to justify sexual liberation under particular circumstances. So, 'the good gay' emerges in activist and academic discourses – a homonormative, monogamous, married, (possibly) reproductive individual, where 'love is love' and who is unremarkable from the heteronormative majority - short of their same-gender interest (See for examples: Puar, 2007; Richardson, 2017). This type of scholarship focuses on neoliberal norms, most often, attempting to consolidate arguments that support legal equality and recognition within existing institutions as opposed to radically challenging or rethinking systems of oppression. In this way, Gay and Lesbian studies have not been free of controversy, due to the ways in which they implicitly reproduce systems of white privilege, sexism, xenophobia, transphobia and monogamy.

The good gay, an aspiration to the homonormative ideal, contrasts with the more radical lesbian theory, such as Radicalesbians' *The Woman-Identified Woman* which argues that "for a woman to be independent means she can't be a woman – she must be a dyke" (Radicalesbians, 1970, p.2). The radical attempts to subvert the patriarchy through forming an oppositional woman-centred society establishes a conflict, not only between 'dyke' and 'man', but also between 'dyke' and 'heterosexual woman' (as she remains unenlightened, and therefore disempowered through providing her emotional and sexual availability to men). The essentialist radical discourse may be radical in its attempts to overthrow the patriarchy, but ultimately establishes a new gendered and sexed hierarchy hostile to men, heterosexual women, and - as is important in our discussion - plurisexuals.

In essence, lesbian and gay studies sought to normalise and celebrate lesbian and gay identities, often in ways that actively excluded plurisexuals. Although many compelling theories and explanations emerged in this time (i.e. heteronormativity), very little care, attention, or positivity was put to understanding plurisexuals' positions as people who engage with different and same gender people in a variety of relationships.

2.3 Queer Studies: Deconstructing Identities

Queer studies is one of the most theoretically engaging and epistemologically challenging schools within sexualities studies. Beginning in the 1980s, and sparking a large amount of interest in the 1990s, there are many active contributors to the field of queer theory including Judith Butler, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, and Jack Halberstam (Halberstam, 1999; Butler, 2007; Sedgwick, 2008). Queer theory is most often used by literary and cultural theorists, however, it has also been adopted by

geographers, sociologists, historians, and feminist theorists (See for example: Duggan, 1994; Roseneil, 2000; Plummer, 2003; Knopp, 2004; Halberstam, 2005; Browne and Nash, 2010; Hines, 2010a).

Queer theory emerged during a tumultuous time in US LGBTQ+ history. The AIDS epidemic was ongoing, and many LGBTQ+ lives were lost in an environment in which the government was rejecting responsibility for looking after those affected by the virus. Many activists turned to more aggressive action, fuelled by anger and distrust of institutions, to attempt to garner more support for LGBTQ+ individuals across the USA. These activists formed groups including ACT UP, the Lavender Hill Mob, Body Positive, PWA Health Group, and the PWA Coalition (See for an overview and history: Elbaz, 1995). LGBTQ+ people organised and demanded government intervention, often with a righteous anger, such as David Wojnarowicz's iconic denim jacket, painted with the slogan; "If I die of AIDS – forget burial – just drop my body on the steps of the F.D.A."[4] (Parsons, 2019). Against these developments within LGBTQ+ activism, queer theory was born as a post-structuralist, subversive, and deconstructivist school of thought.

Often regarded as queer theory's key contributor, Judith Butler developed the concept of performativity. Heavily influenced by psychoanalytic and Lacanian thought, Butler argued that due to discursive social pressures, individuals were assigned sexed and gendered identities based on performative utterances; that is, through declaring someone 'married' or a 'woman' or a 'man' the authoritative utterer (a priest, registrar, doctor) imposed a social category onto an individual that then shaped their experiences and identities (Butler, 2004, 2007, 2015). Individuals must then perform accordingly to their assigned identities - in the case of gender, through adopting appropriate forms of dress, self-expression, modesty, and sexual expression. Consequently, there is no innate identity as people simply attempt to perform ideals for which there is no original. Butler's account rested on the discursive construction of the self and can be critiqued for leaving the body and agency outside of the frame of analysis in her account. Although Butler has worked to redress this through writing the excellent *Bodies That Matter,* Butler's work remains largely theoretical and fails to account for a lived, everyday experience in the material world (Butler, 1993a). This lived experience and embodiment is critical in attempting to understand the power dynamic implicit in plurisexual relationships, given that the engagement with certain (i.e. differently-gendered) bodies will allow plurisexual people to navigate the world freely, whilst engagement with other (i.e. same-gender) bodies will create difficulties for plurisexual people based on potential homophobic reactions. Although whether or not a person will be subject to homophobia can transform based on the partner that a plurisexual is seen

[4] This slogan has recently been repurposed by an unknown trans activist whose denim jacket reads "If transphobia kills me forget burial – drop by body on the steps of congress" (Parsons, 2019).

with, it remains true that both attractions and sexual romantic interests remain integral to a plurisexual person. These gender and body considerations have a significant impact on whether an individual is regarded as 'appropriate' or 'inappropriate' by others. Although Butler's work intended to expand identities and therefore deconstruct identities, she did not explore the possible fluidity or ambiguity of identity through using plurisexuality as a tool of destabilisation that can break down monosexist ideas of heterosexuality or lesbian/gay identity, but focused on queerness primarily as a same-gender romantic or sexual interest. Butler's work also does not translate well to exploring everyday life, as her emphasis is on discursive practices that shape sexual hierarchies.

Different to most queer theorists, Sara Ahmed takes account of the body in her queer theoretical writings. In her text, *Queer Phenomenology*, Ahmed used a phenomenological approach in understanding how our identities are formed on the basis of the world around us and from our bodies' experiences. Ahmed wrote that phenomenology is a useful way of understanding queerness as:

> phenomenology can offer a resource […] insofar as it emphasizes the importance of lived experience, the intentionality of consciousness, the significance of nearness or what is ready-to-hand, and the role of repeated and habitual actions in shaping bodies and worlds (Ahmed 2006, p.2).

Using the concept of orientation, Ahmed wrote that to be queer and consequently have a non-normative sexuality means not only that there is a difference in our sexual object choices, but also that there are "differences in one's very relation to the world – that is, in how one 'faces' the world or is directed toward it" (Ahmed 2006, p.68). For Ahmed, the naturalisation of heterosexuality means that to be queer or to be attracted to the same-gender necessarily involves deviating, or queering, from what is expected, which has significant social consequences. This phenomenological approach emphasised the way in which our bodies' experiences, desires and actions directly colour the social identity we can occupy in a socio-sexual context. In exploring these claims further, Ahmed emphasised an experience of orientating oneself to others based on her experience as a lesbian. How plurisexuality fits into this queer phenomenological approach was not discussed, which is a distinct omission given that plurisexuals can be ascribed as heterosexual or gay/lesbian dependent on their partner choice or flirtation. Ironically, as potentially useful as Ahmed's concept is to understanding the role of the plurisexual body in the social world, Ahmed's theory did not explicitly theorise or include where plurisexuality fits into the binary system of orientation she wrote about – symptomatic of the lack of plurisexual representation in monosexist academia, as well as missing the opportunity to demonstrate

the potential subversive and helpful role that plurisexuality could play in developing queer theory further. However, it is important to note that Ahmed's theory is genuinely useful for considering how people conduct themselves in a sexual landscape and social structure. It simply has not been fleshed out enough in relation to plurisexuality.

Queer theory generally has often excluded plurisexuality from its frame of discussion. Hemmings highlighted how many theorists demonise plurisexuality as an identity which reinforces sexed and gendered norms, as bisexuality in particular is assumed to be desirous of *oppositional* genders (i.e. men and women) (Hemmings, 2002). Consequently, Hemmings wrote that plurisexuality is "rarely examined as a potentially enlightening analytical tool or starting point for knowledge" (Hemmings, 2002, p.1). As Hemming suggested, the lack of engagement with plurisexuality from theoretical or methodological perspectives thus facilitates the oppositional dynamic between men/women, heterosexual/gay that queer theorists critique in interpreting plurisexual identities (Hemmings, 2002). Callis has also noted the way that queer theorists tend to rely on interpreting sexuality through monosexist heterosexual and gay/lesbian lenses, thus reproducing binary dynamics that queer theorists are critical of when regarding (and misinterpreting) plurisexual identities (Callis, 2009). Callis suggested that through conceptualising plurisexual identities from a queer theoretical perspective, queer theorists could better expand on deconstructive theories related to binary sexualities and gender (Callis, 2009). In essence, the queer theoretical intent to deconstruct identities or subvert identities ultimately fails to recognise monosexism and other discursive pressures that impact specifically plurisexual people. Through broadly dividing sexuality into 'queer' (i.e. same-gender activity), and 'heterosexual' (i.e. different-gender activity), the intention to deconstruct and subvert identity to allow more freedom ultimately ends up ignoring the theoretical, practical, and social plight of individuals who may engage with both heterosexual and queer communities. This is further complicated by the fact that plurisexual people are not heterosexual when having relationships with differently-gendered people – if sexuality is understood as an identity rather than only a behaviour. Thus, they are consistently queer. However, this tension is unexplored in the majority of queer theoretical literature, and plurisexual people are most often simply drawn into a 'queer' grouping that is not theorised in relation to the complications presented by their engagement with people who are heterosexual.

Queer theory broadly fails to theorise how plurisexuality is subject to heteronormative and monosexist discourse, and thus does not account for the discursive pressures that plurisexuals experience. Queer theory operates in a privileged position, theorising about identities without considering the lived experience of the world. Through attempting to deconstruct and subvert identities, queer theory does not empathise with real-world situations which require individuals to

occupy identity categories (Halperin, 2003). This is true of the majority of queer theoretical work; however, it is notable that queer politics and activism, characterised most often by anti-capitalism and anti-institutionalism, does take into account real world institutions in an attempt to remove institutional and social barriers that impact people's lived experience. Queer *theory*, however, typically evades the materiality and spatiality of real world experiences, with a broadly discursive focus and anti-identarian perspective disallowing the potential freedom of occupying an identity category (Walton, Lykins and Bhullar, 2016). For example, two notable queer theorists - Butler and Sedgwick – wrote extensively about the problematic discursive relationship between identity categories. Their suggestion of the discursive construction of sexuality is that to be gay is to be not-straight and vice versa. Consequently, through deconstructing the use of the terminology to highlight the shaky premise that each word stands upon, the theoretical conclusion of each author led to the belief that identities are overall harmful due to the limitation of experience and the inevitable hierarchy of identification accorded to each categorisation (Butler, 2007; Sedgwick, 2008). For those LGBTQ+ individuals born into conservative environments, where the essentialism of an identity may be of comfort, queer theory has no purpose in helping someone come to terms with their identity and claim a place in society. Equally, for those who wish to embrace and celebrate their identities (constructed or otherwise), queer theory can be problematic. In essence, the scholarship may be philosophically compelling, however, translating the scholarship into real-life scenarios, politics, or empirical studies is inherently problematic due to the possibility of disenfranchising people of their claimed identities.

2.4 LGBTQ Studies: Embracing Identities

LGBTQ studies is one of the newest schools of thought within sexualities studies. Departing from deconstructionist and anti-identarian thought, LGBTQ studies returns to the influence of Lesbian and Gay studies through conducting identity-based scholarship. Characterised by Monro et al. as beginning in the early 2000s, LGBTQ studies has opened the field of analysis from lesbian, gay, and queer identities to incorporate other diverse sexual practices, including polyamory, kink, and other transgressive sexual practices (Monro, Hines and Osborne, 2017). The specificity of this emergent trend in sexualities scholarship lies in the fact that it is akin to a revisionist interpretation of Lesbian and Gay Studies that has been informed by intersectionality, and is different from queer theoretical approaches due to its renewed emphasis on identities (Monro, Hines and Osborne, 2017). This emergent field parallels LGBTQ+ activists who increasingly incorporate different identity descriptors, not only to describe what they look like and what subculture they belong to (i.e. bear, twink, dyke), but also to describe sexual practices and romantic relationship configurations (i.e. polyamorous, demisexual, asexual). The growing awareness of kink and relationship configurations also extends to an awareness of intersectionality with the London 2017 Pride Parade expanded its marching

contingents to include corporate banking groups, Gaysians+, youth groups, student groups, Puppy Pride, TransPALS, Black Pride, and more (PIL, 2017). The increasing recognition of intersecting identities within the LGBTQ+ community is indicative of a growing sense of understanding of the uniquely situated experiences individuals have because of their race, sexual interests and kinks, gender expression, and class. Interestingly, in the case of the 2017 London Pride, initially no plurisexual groups were included in the march, indicative of institutional biphobia as plurisexuality was entirely overlooked (White, 2017). The growing subcultures within the LGBTQ+ community have occurred simultaneously with a new wave of sexualities scholarship, emphasising intersectionality to an extent that further fractures monolithic identities of whiteness and able-bodiedness that often pervades images of gay and lesbian people in academia and activism.

LGBTQ studies interrogate the way in which new sexual practices evolve and take meaning, such as in Seidman et al.'s 2012 text, *Introducing the New Sexuality Studies*. In its introduction, the textbook purported to "raise questions that were not addressed, or even posed, earlier" around sexualities (Seidman et al. 2012, p.xii). The text suggested that "the new sexuality studies understand sexual identities as historically emergent" and troubled the way in which identities and behaviours can conflict in description and continuity (Seidman et al. 2012, p.xii). Although this new form of sexuality studies seemed like a bastion of hope, allowing individuals to identify by their sexual practices, sexual identities, sexual behaviours, or actively refute identities, erasure is still evident with small phrases such as "new sexual identities may emerge, such as a bisexual […] identity" which ultimately suggested that bisexuality is a far more recent invention than gay/lesbian identities when, in reality, people have been identifying as bisexual since the introduction of the term in the early 1900s (Seidman et al. 2012, p.xiii).

Monro, in assessing a wide range of texts from 1970-2015 for their inclusion of bisexuality, suggests that "LGBT and LGBTQ texts have a tendency towards bisexual invisibility or a lack of bisexual-specific material" (Monro et al. 2017, p.672). Although there is a growing diversification within sexuality studies in terms of the identities being taken into consideration, ultimately LGBTQ studies still have very little in the way of plurisexual specific texts when compared to the focus on lesbian, gay, or heterosexual identities. An example of this is in 2016 text, *After Marriage Equality: The Future of LGBT Rights*, which explored the shape of the LGBTQ+ movement following the legalisation of same-sex marriage in the USA (Ball, 2016). Throughout the text, 'LGBT' was taken as a synonym for lesbian/gay with no mention of any bisexual/plurisexual specific issues which need addressing, such as the lived experiences of poorer mental and physical health, the higher levels of sexual assault and domestic violence, and poorer overall health among plurisexuals (Jorm *et al.*, 2002; Walters, Chen and Breiding, 2013; Colledge *et al.*, 2015). The lack of institutionalisation of plurisexual studies is indicative

of a lack of understanding or broader omission of plurisexual identities, and the lack of serious engagement with plurisexuality as a mode of study demonstrates the inadequacy of LGBTQ+ scholarship in providing an overview of diverse sexualities.

2.5 Sexualities Studies: The Absence of Plurisexuality

Plurisexuality needs more academic attention to enable interventions that can better support plurisexuals in society, given the poor mental health outcomes for and social experiences of plurisexuals. However, plurisexuality has been underrepresented within sexuality studies, leaving significant gaps in the empirical and theoretical scholarship regarding plurisexuality. In early sexology studies, plurisexuality was seen as a negative trait and conceptualised as linked to gender. Where plurisexual behaviour was observed in Kinsey's studies, this did not form the basis of a theoretical or sociological intervention to explore the impact of holding a plurisexual identity. In Lesbian and Gay studies, plurisexual identities have been actively regarded with suspicion and contempt, often suggested as being not real or not ready to accept a gay/lesbian identity. Queer theory has provided the most promising avenue for exploring plurisexual identities, however, theorists have failed to adequately and explicitly grapple with plurisexual identities meaning that there is a scarcity of attention to an already underrepresented identity. LGBTQ+ studies similarly ignores and omits plurisexuality in general. Although plurisexuality is often integrated into wider studies or theories concerning LGBTQ+ identities, the specificities of plurisexual experience are not theorised or understood to the extent of gay and lesbian identities.

Given the existing empirical data regarding the dire situation for plurisexual people, the overall omission of plurisexual identities in mainstream empirical work, and the absence of theoretical work around plurisexuality, there is a need to include plurisexuality in scholarship through epistemological, ontological, and theoretical enquiry. Monro et al. suggest that the reasons for invisibility are - broadly speaking - the biphobia of researchers themselves, the cultural stigma around plurisexuality, and – as Monro et al. argue - the way in which plurisexual research has failed to become institutionalised in the same way that Lesbian and Gay studies have become institutionalised due to heterosexism and monosexism (Monro, Hines and Osborne, 2017). Mainstream sexualities scholarship has failed to adequately address ways of knowing plurisexuality. However, there is a small field of plurisexuality studies that can be drawn upon for theoretical and scholarly direction.

This thesis will intervene in the academic management of plurisexual identities within sexualities scholarship. Given the alarmingly poor rates of plurisexual mental and physical outcomes, the variety of social issues plurisexuals experience, and the knowledge that the population of plurisexual people is increasing (GEO, 2018; ONS, 2019), this thesis seeks to position plurisexuals at

the centre of inquiry to offer a new theoretical perspective to contribute to sexuality studies as a discipline. This thesis will address the unacknowledged monosexism of sexuality studies and contribute to queer and LGBTQ+ turns in sexuality studies by offering a plurisexual account of sexuality and its implications and offer an empirical account of how plurisexual people understand their sexualities. As I will demonstrate, gender is of critical importance in studying plurisexuality, and sexuality generally. This thesis will contribute to a growing range of studies focused on plurisexuality in its many forms and offer a new theoretical perspective that positions gender as a central focus in interpreting identity.

The following chapter will turn to exploring plurisexual studies[5] to gauge how plurisexual research has developed, and whether there are significant lacks or omissions in the field overall. As I will demonstrate, plurisexual studies have developed amidst monosexist scholarship and opinions and consequently has had to justify its place to a significant degree. As a result, much of the scholarship is focused on validating and proving plurisexual identities exist and function well within heterosexual and lesbian and gay environments, meaning that there is a potential to develop further literature that departs from validating plurisexual identities.

[5] The majority of scholarship refers to plurisexual identities as 'bisexual', which complicates the language I use in this thesis. I believe that these 'bisexual' specific studies and theories can be applied to understanding various other multigender-attracted identities such as pansexuals, queer people, and others and therefore have chosen to use 'plurisexual' in describing most scholarship, except for when directly quoting.

Chapter 3: Plurisexuality Scholarship and the Treatment of Gender

3.0 Plurisexuality Studies Over Time

Working within monosexist institutions, and often living amongst monosexist individuals, or working as activists in groups that are suspicious of plurisexuality, many plurisexual scholars have nevertheless contributed to the small field of plurisexuality studies. These scholars have shared important viewpoints that centre plurisexual identities so that plurisexual identities are no longer absorbed within larger studies of LGBTQ+ identities or interpreted on the basis of the gender of their partner (i.e. half-gay/half-straight). These writers, activists, and authors have sought to give voice to the complexities of these identities and acknowledge plurisexual identities as complete entities or subjects as opposed to variants of heterosexual, lesbian, or gay people.

Splitting from Lesbian and Gay studies during the 1980s, plurisexuality studies have found far less attention, contributors, and theoretical development than the scholarship surrounding queer theory, lesbians, and gay men. However, the field of plurisexual specific scholarship has seen several different emergent themes and iterations. Given that there is – to my knowledge – no existing genealogy of plurisexual scholarship, I have identified four schools of thought within which to locate much of the work. Initially, life narratives were prominent before two more theoretically developed schools of thought emerged; those who believe that plurisexuality is a transcendent sexual orientation, and those who are critical of plurisexuality in the construction, maintenance, and policing of sexual identities, orientations and practices. There is more recently a new direction in plurisexual scholarship that emphasises the lived experience of plurisexuals far more than previous work.

Gender is an important focus in exploring plurisexuality given that the gender of a partner dictates whether plurisexuals will be seen as gay or heterosexual by others. Transcendent scholars in particular have focused on the dynamics of gender in plurisexuality, however, I will argue that the role of gender in plurisexuality has been understudied and undertheorised. Each school of thought has its own important place in interpreting sexuality and gender; however, I believe that there is significant scope to develop the theory further with the help of previous scholarship, particularly in relation to embodied gender.

Where gender has been incorporated well into a study of plurisexuality, there remains an absence of trans and non binary narratives, cis male narratives, and other intersecting experiences of race or nationality. There have been significant failures within plurisexual scholarship to address the different experiences of plurisexuals who are not white middle-class women. Repeatedly, plurisexual scholars have referenced the lack of study into plurisexual men (Steinman, 2000, 2011; Edser and Shea, 2002; Anderson, Scoats and McCormack, 2015; McCormack, Wignall and Anderson, 2015; Flanders, 2018) and plurisexual people of colour (Muñoz-Laboy, 2019). These specific calls sit amongst

more general calls for research into disabled bodies, trans bodies, and non binary bodies within broader LGBTQ+ scholarship (Hines, 2006b, 2006a, 2010a; Richards *et al.*, 2016). I will not unpick these comments in depth in the coming pages, other than to say that the vast majority of the studies and theoretical pieces in the coming chapter centre white, cis, women in their theorisation of plurisexuality. There is a need for scholarship that centres different identities, or at least includes more diverse samples.

3.1 Plurisexual Life Narratives: Activists at the forefront

Life narrative plurisexual scholarship, which occurred mainly during the 1980s-1990s, saw the proliferation of texts that sought to position plurisexuality as a valid sexual orientation. These texts were written by key plurisexual activists and scholars including Lani Kaahumanu, Loraine Hutchins, Fritz Klein, Amanda Udis-Kessler, and Naomi Tucker (Klein, 1993; Hutchins and Kaahumanu, 1995; Tucker, 1995; Udis-Kessler, 1995). Such texts were often direct responses to the lesbian and gay literature that had excluded plurisexual identities from the wider civil rights movements and essentially attempted to reposition plurisexuality as an identity worthy of attention and care in the wider movement. Through telling their stories, these activist-writers hoped to garner wider attention for their identities whilst also emphasising the unique positionality and orientation of plurisexual identities, moving away from the belief that plurisexual identities could simply be folded into lesbian and gay theorisation, or heterosexual theorisation – rebutting the half-gay/half-straight narrative. Furthermore, these texts attempted to serve as a validation of and mode of collecting other plurisexual identities to garner a collective consciousness and weave together a plurisexual community that was distinct from the wider LGBTQ+ community. Many of the pieces that fall into this school of thought were written by activist-writers who operated within the same circles, with a variety of editorial collections emerging from regional and national groups (particularly within the USA).

One of the most famous plurisexual texts from within this school is the 1995 *Bi Any Other Name: Bisexual People Speak Out*. This collection of essays, poems, life stories, and speeches by various plurisexuals was based on experience to justify a plurisexual identity (Hutchins and Kaahumanu, 1995). Hutchins and Kaahumanu wrote that they were inspired to write the text in the wake of the AIDS crisis as "Lani left Loraine a note "Let's write the book we've been longing to read. Let's trust our own sweet selves to do it!"" (Hutchins & Kaahumanu 1995, p.xvi). The text was written with a feminist intersectional approach and represents a diverse range of authors sharing their experiences of plurisexuality and race, (dis)ability, gender, and sexual behaviours. In 2016, Kate Harrad developed and edited *Purple Prose: Bisexuality in Britain* (Harrad, 2016) as an answer to the American *Bi Any Other Name* (Hutchins and Kaahumanu, 1995). Similar to Hutchins and Kaahumanu, Harrad wrote that "this book is here to tell you something we hope you already know – that plurisexuality is

real and valid" (Harrad 2016, p.1). Written in the wake of LGBTQ studies, this text has a somewhat more diverse approach to exploring plurisexuality, introducing concepts surrounding plurisexuality and monogamy, ethnicity, faith, kink, and aging. Both texts, as is clear from the editorial notes at the beginning of the texts, are intended for plurisexual people to read. Furthermore, both texts tell stories of plurisexual people's experiences of gender (individually, societally, and in relationships). Through centring personal experiences of plurisexuality, the texts aimed for readers to engage with, understand, and see that they are not alone in their desires and identities. These pieces represent an important part of plurisexual history, being amongst the most notable texts aimed at gathering together activist experiences, charting the highs and lows of plurisexuality amidst biphobia and monosexism, as well as the joy of being plurisexual and the romantic and sexual experiences that can stem from fully embracing these identities. In the course of interviewing the participants of this PhD study, a number of people referred to these texts as important to their own development of sexual identity and feelings of validation and certainty regarding their desires.

In addition to personal life narratives, scholars began to create theoretical perspectives to understand plurisexual identities. Centred on individual experiences, psychologists and sexologists such as Fritz Klein, Erwin J Haeberle, and Rolf Gindorf wrote texts including the 1993 *The Bisexual Option*, and the 1998 *Bisexualities: The Ideology and Practice of Sexual Contact with both Men and Women* (Klein, 1993; Haeberle and Gindorf, 1999). These texts adopted an emancipatory psycho-biological approach to situate plurisexuality as a valid and appropriate sexual identity. In attempting to surmise how people came to identify as plurisexual, the texts included case studies, empirical research, and ruminations on the origins of sexuality, as well as an overview of historical instances of plurisexuality in arts and culture. Notably, these are similar developments comparative to early sexuality studies, where psychologists and sexologists attempted to understand how sexual identities developed. The key difference in this particular subfield of work is that the work was written with an emancipatory and validating aim, seeking to position plurisexual identities as normal, common, and valid, contrary to the experience of some plurisexual people accessing mental health services who have been pathologised and advised that their plurisexual identity contributes to their poor mental health (Page, 2007; Eady, Dobinson and Ross, 2011; Barker *et al.*, 2012).

The individual-oriented life narrative and psychological work around plurisexuality is one of the most prolific subsections within plurisexual scholarship. The intentions of this scholarship often revolve around giving voice to an unheard-from sexual identity, attempting to reposition plurisexual identities as critical within sexuality studies, and validating the identities in themselves as opposed to identities that could be understood through studying lesbian, gay or heterosexual identities. These intentions are significant in that they are indicative of the wider concerns around plurisexuality that

stem from monosexism and the resultant invalidation of plurisexual identities in both scholarship and activism. These texts have been critical in constructing a plurisexual consciousness, not only for newly-identifying plurisexuals who may feel reticent in claiming an identity, but also for scholars who may not have been convinced by plurisexuality as a valid identity. However, although this school of plurisexual scholarship has been of incredible importance to many people, it is not sufficient for a sociological interpretation of the experience of plurisexuals. It is individually-oriented, and – although referencing social forces of homophobia, biphobia, and monosexism – often chooses not to engage with the sociological imaginary in terms of interpreting plurisexuality's place amidst the varieties of sexual and gender identities prevalent. As a result, the individualist focus and emancipatory validation of plurisexual identities is helpful for garnering a collective consciousness, but ultimately does not translate into a critical interrogation of how plurisexual identities reproduce, challenge, or exist within constraining/freeing social paradigms. In particular, whilst the texts provide illuminating narratives into peoples' experiences of gender, they do not draw these together to create a sociological theory explaining the social significance of being plurisexual in a heavily gendered society.

3.2 Plurisexuality as Transcendent: Plurisexuality as Synonymous with Desire

In parallel to the development of life narrative plurisexual scholarship, other theorists have engaged with plurisexuality in terms of how it shapes and is shaped by other sexual identities. I have classified this second group of scholars as the 'transcendents', as their work underscores how plurisexuality subverts traditional gender binaries to form a transcendent sexuality without limits. In these authors' views, plurisexuality is equated to humanity's 'innate' sensuality and sexuality, with plurisexuality situated as a return to 'natural' desires and passions through transcending the pressures of monosexism, biphobia, and homophobia. Thus, for these scholars there are two types of people in the world; plurisexuals, and those whose sexualities were restricted by monosexism. Scholars contributing to this mode of thought include Marjorie Garber, Charlotte Wolff, and Beth A. Firestein (Wolff, 1979; Firestein, 1996; Garber, 1997).

Gender remains a critical concept within these scholars' studies, as authors demonstrated how plurisexuals evolved past the limitations of gender. Charlotte Wolff, a psychiatrist and psychologist, wrote *Bisexuality: A Study* in 1977. Wolff, influenced by Freud, writes that "bisexuality is the root of human sexuality, and the matrix of all bio-psychical reactions, be they passive or active" (Wolff 1979, p.1). In thinking on gender, Wolff suggested a relationship between plurisexuality and androgyny, writing that:

> all bisexual people are aware of their male/female gender identity, and therefore terrain, consciously or unconsciously, a spark of the androgynous magic of love […] Androgyny or bisexuality inside the Self is the basis of creative energy. It is impossible to isolate an individual's creative energy from cosmic energy which pervades all and everything. The whole of nature is under its spell (Wolff 1979, p.200).

The connection Wolff made between sexuality, gender identity and gender expression is not unusual within plurisexual scholarship, although usually this is expressed in less poetic terms. Wolff's connection of plurisexuality with androgyny concluded that plurisexuality is transcendent, as it is the basis for all other sexual and gender expression, and consequently the most authentic way of engaging with one's sexual desires and interests. Plurisexuality is equated to sexuality more generally and Wolff asserted that plurisexuals have transcended monosexist barriers surrounding sex and gender to return to a sexuality that is authentic to all humans but only accessible by plurisexuals who have transcended social limitations. A hierarchy is established where plurisexuals are seen to be more authentic following their return to a more 'natural' sexuality that has an evolved vision of gender and sex, beyond the cultural constructions of gender. This view does not take into account the reality of gender, where gender matters significantly to individuals on the basis not only of identity, but also in terms of safety and therefore cannot be transcended to the point where gender no longer matters. In a plurisexual context, this is discussed at length in chapters 7 and 8. In the context of broader gender studies, Hines' corpus of work has illustrated how gender is incredibly salient and transformational for trans and non binary people (Hines, 2006b, 2006a, 2010b, 2010a) Different to Wolff's work, Hines' work points to how gender is not (or should not) be erased into an androgynous understanding of gender, given that gender identities have significant spatial, temporal, and contextual salience for individuals, particularly trans and non binary people.

Marjorie Garber, a Professor of English, theorised a similar concept to Wolff in her 1995 text *Vice Versa: Bisexuality and the Eroticism of Everyday Life*. Garber described plurisexuality as a Mobius strip, where 'homosexuality' and heterosexuality are connected by a Mobius strip that is plurisexuality itself. In this view, everything is plurisexual, as plurisexuality incorporates the heterosexual and the 'homosexual'. Garber continued:

> If bisexuality is in fact […] not just another sexual orientation but rather a sexuality that undoes sexual orientation as a category, a sexuality that threatens and challenges the easy binarities of straight and gay, queer and 'het,' and even, through its biological and physiological meanings, the gender categories of male and female, then the search of the meaning of the word 'bisexual' offers a different kind of lesson […] The erotic discovery

> of bisexuality is the fact that it reveals sexuality to be a process of growth, transformation, and surprise, not a stable and knowable state of being (Garber 1997, p.65-66).

Garber wrote that plurisexuality can be substituted for the concept of sexuality on the whole. Furthermore, Garber asserted that to study plurisexuality is to deconstruct notions of gender and sexuality as we know it, suggesting that plurisexuality demonstrates the fallibility of these concepts as plurisexuals transcend cultural limitations of gender to enjoy sexuality and the eroticism of everyday life. Garber suggested that plurisexuals are more authentic and better at 'doing' sex and gender than heterosexuals, lesbians, and gay people. Although in many ways, Garber's work may be perceived as stemming from a queer theoretical tradition, her work does not attempt to deconstruct identities beyond lesbian and gay identities, instead reinforcing plurisexual identities as the ideal version of sexuality. Garber's work talked back to the psychoanalytic tradition wherein plurisexual identities were considered the undeveloped versions of sexuality, and plurisexuality would be matured from in order to then identify as gay, lesbian, or heterosexual. Furthermore, Garber explicitly created a hierarchy where plurisexual identities are located as the critical base of all identities, and thus must be better understood in order to conceptualise notions of heterosexuality and 'homosexuality'. In attempting to escape a monosexist binary of sexualities, Garber simply established a secondary binary of plurisexual/everyone else, which for her is shorthand for enlightened/unenlightened. Furthermore, Garber's contention that plurisexuality challenged the gender binary is not entirely convincing, given the way that gender is still important for many plurisexuals as this thesis later elucidates. Despite these critiques, Garber's work is important within the plurisexual canon as she established plurisexuality as a theoretically interesting and potentially transformative concept through which we can better understand gender and sexuality. Furthermore, Garber's work actively sought to debunk various understandings of plurisexual identities as underdeveloped, greedy, or base. Several plurisexuals who I interviewed in the course of this study described this text as being important to them and referenced it as a watershed moment in how they understood themselves.

In many ways, the transcendents' aims run parallel to Lesbian and Gay studies, as transcendents sought to locate plurisexuality in a history, validate plurisexuality as an appropriate social identity, and highlight the ways in which plurisexuality functions against monosexist assumptions surrounding sex and gender. Transcendents wove positive representations of plurisexuality through their scholarship. However, the narrative of plurisexuals as sexually enlightened is problematic and likely stems from the historical absence of plurisexuality in sexualities scholarship and is therefore a resultant attempt to validate plurisexuality. I argue it is inappropriate to suggest that plurisexuality is a synonymous to sexuality, as a plurisexual identity is a culturally, spatially, and

temporally bound concept. That is, bisexuality or pansexuality are terms that are particularly salient in Western cultures and are terms that have developed over the last century and a half. Identities and instincts must be separated in a sociological study resulting in interpreting plurisexuality and desire separately. An identity based sociological approach can accommodate the critiques of this school of thought, transforming a study of plurisexuality into a pragmatic form of scholarship that is consciously constructed within a particular time and space, as discussed in Chapter 1. Furthermore, claiming the superiority of one identity over another fails to address the socially constructed nature of identities, and reinforces a hierarchy that is a subversion of the monosexist hierarchy. Finally, in writing that plurisexuals are masters of gender, or that they have overcome gender, these theorists do not recognise how plurisexuals often have to act and perform in gendered ways given the continued social significance of gender. The use of gender, the lack of suspicion over the construction of categories, and the lack of emphasis on everyday experience using empirical data makes the accounts of the transcendent theorists less convincing as a result.

3.3 Critical Plurisexual Studies: Deconstructing Identities

Whilst the fields of plurisexual life narratives, and plurisexuality as transcendent flourished, another school of thought emerged, which took a far more critical approach to understanding plurisexuality. The queer theoretical turn in sexuality studies informed scholars who meditated on the consideration of plurisexuality as a sexual identity, complicit in the construction and maintenance of other sexual identities. Scholars in this field wrote that plurisexuals form one side of a triangle in the formation of sexual identities, as opposed to common depictions of plurisexuals occupying the space in between heterosexuality and gay/lesbian people on a spectrum. Scholars problematised the conflict between the stable identifier of 'plurisexual' and the reality of the lived fluidity of sexual experience and behaviour amongst plurisexuals. Scholars working within this philosophy include Clare Hemmings, Steven Angelides, April Callis, Laura Erickson-Schroth, and Jennifer Mitchell (Angelides, 2001; Hemmings, 2002; Callis, 2009; Erickson-Schroth and Mitchell, 2009). Influenced by queer theory, the scholars in this tradition theorised the way in which 'plurisexuality' is maintained and constructed within discourse, as well critiquing how plurisexuality is presented as transcendent by other scholars. Although the scholars in this tradition relied heavily on queer theory, they were also highly critical of queer theory due to its tendency to evade the topic of plurisexuality. In many ways, plurisexual critical theorists used queer theory against itself to demonstrate the ways in which queer theorists tend to reify monosexist perceptions of sexuality, omit plurisexuality, and consequently fail to accurately depict dominant monosexist structures within society. Due to plurisexual critical theorists' ways of talking about queer theory, I believe it is beneficial to separate queer theory and plurisexual critical

theory to demonstrate the capacity through which plurisexuality is operationalised (or not) in the course of theorising sexuality.

Steven Angelides was among the first to apply a queer lens to studying plurisexuality in his 2001 monograph, *A History of Bisexuality*. In this text, Angelides showed that plurisexuality is not, is commonly held, a poor derivative of heterosexuality or gay/lesbian identities. Rather:

> to invoke and define any one of the terms hetero-, homo- or bisexuality is to invoke and define the others by default. Each requires the other two for its self-definition. The effect of this logical, or axiomatic, structure is such that shifts in any one of the terms hetero-, bi-, or homosexuality require and engender shifts in the others (Angelides 2001, p.16).

In this way, Angelides showed plurisexuality is not transcendent, but part of a system of sexual categorisations which constrict our sexuality through discursive means. Although Angelides recognised plurisexuality's role in maintaining sexual identities, Angelides also suggested that plurisexuality's fluidity could be helpful in deconstructing sexual identities. If plurisexuality were recognised in contemporary sexualities scholarship:

> such a development might indeed engender […] a state of epistemological fatigue or identity crisis, profoundly weakening or even twisting and distorting the framework of sexual identity itself (Angelides 2001, p.195).

Angelides suggested that discussing plurisexuality can often maintain problematically narrow sexualities, but through engaging with plurisexuality intentionally, scholars can subvert and distort mainstream sexuality scholarship. Angelides called for further empirical and theoretical research into plurisexuality to shore up knowledge from which we can problematise wider categories of sexuality and gender.

Clare Hemmings 2002 text *Bisexual Spaces: A Geography of Sexuality and Gender* is an example of how plurisexuality is seen as complicit in the maintenance and construction of sexual identities. Hemmings contends that the claim of a natural plurisexuality put forward by transcendent theorists, and the claims of Lesbian and Gay scholars who describe plurisexuality as a 'failed' sexuality, are wholly incorrect. Rather, Hemmings suggested that:

> I want to emphasize the consistent partiality of plurisexual experience and its consistent presence in the formation of 'other' sexual and gendered subjectivities (Hemmings 2002, p.42).

Hemmings posits that plurisexuality is a useful lens through which to theorise sex and gender given its fluid approach to sex and gender expressions. Historically, plurisexual scholars have often presented plurisexuality as normative – that is, everyone is (or has the potential to be) plurisexual - negating plurisexuality's subversive possibilities, whilst simultaneously presenting plurisexuality as transcendent through its rejection of binarised gender and sex norms. Hemmings concluded that plurisexuality must be studied in a way that recognises not only plurisexual identities, but also the inherent links between heterosexual, plurisexual, lesbian and gay identities. In this way, plurisexuality can be used to inform our understandings of sex, gender, and sexuality to a degree not currently achieved through monosexist perceptions of the topics.

Plurisexual critical theory is subject to similar critiques as those made of queer theory, due to their interlinked nature. The scholars who believed plurisexuality is complicit in maintaining a system of sexual categorisation - such as Callis, Erickson-Schroth, and Mitchell - attempted to expand queer theory through the insertion of the plurisexual experience as a point of departure for interpreting discursive constructions of sexualities (Callis, 2009; Erickson-Schroth and Mitchell, 2009). Like Butler's claims in *Gender Trouble*, this tradition situated plurisexuality as a way to deconstruct discourses around sex and gender expression. Hemmings' and Angelides' arguments were compelling, and their use of queer theory to explore plurisexuality's role in illuminating discussions around sexuality is a strength within critical plurisexual studies. However, although theoretically and philosophically compelling, the use of queer theory failed to ground its theory in an analysis of real lives and everyday experiences. The absence of plurisexual lives, everyday experiences, and interactions meant that Hemmings' and Angelides' work on plurisexuality has transformed plurisexuality into a metaphor that cannot easily be applied to interpreting plurisexual people's lived experiences. Albeit epistemologically and ontologically fascinating, this work is difficult to use to analyse real world situations to create emancipatory scholarship. Further, this discursive analysis did not adequately engage with the experiences of gender and the body in plurisexual lives, which – as I will illustrate more comprehensively in chapter 4 – are critical elements of plurisexuality.

3.4 New Directions in Plurisexual Scholarship

In more recent years, a number of theoretically promising articles have begun to emerge from scholars who engage with plurisexuality. These scholars seem responsive to the criticisms of queer theory, and broadly attempt to engage with different lived experiences in relation to plurisexuality,

such as gender and race. This has resulted in scholars becoming more engaged with everyday life and lived experiences when understanding plurisexuality. There are not many scholars engaging with this emerging school of thought at present, but psychological and sociological studies have been conducted by Pennington, Muñoz-Laboy, Lynch and Maree, Monro, and Hayfield (Pennington, 2009; Hayfield *et al.*, 2013; Monro, 2015; Lynch and Maree, 2017; Muñoz-Laboy, 2019).

A small body of sociological feminist research has demonstrated that plurisexuals replicate or experience gender norms in their relationships (Pennington, 2009; Lynch and Maree, 2017; Daly, King and Yeadon-Lee, 2018). In an article written on plurisexuals' romantic relationships, Pennington wrote that:

> it seems plausible that bisexuals may be more cognizant of gender and sexuality performances than those who identify as heterosexual or homosexual because bisexuals must negotiate many unscripted social circumstances […] even when there is some resistance to traditional gender arrangements, bisexuals do not have access to any other co-existing ideologies about sex/gender to reconceptualize themselves as women and men or reorganize their patterns of interactions with others. Bisexuals are socialized to the same cultural ideologies about sex/gender and sexuality as everyone else, and bisexuals often maintain traditional gender ideologies and enact standard gender performances […] Although bisexuals frequently employ traditional scripts for gender in their relationships, they do so with great individual agency and purposive negotiation between relationship partners (Pennington 2009, p. 65-66).

Pennington's commentary regarding plurisexuals' management of gender dynamics in relationships forms the basic theoretical grounding for this thesis given her acknowledgement of gendered influences upon everyday life. The authors contributing to this more grounded strain of plurisexual thought have written pieces that demonstrate the lived experience and relational qualities of gender for plurisexuals, where plurisexuals are neither transcendent of gender expectations, nor wholly bound to expectations related to gender (Pennington, 2009; Lynch and Maree, 2017; Daly, King and Yeadon-Lee, 2018). As Lynch and Maree wrote, plurisexuals can push against gender norms, slowly destabilising them through their relationship practices and desires (2017). Daly et al. and Hayfield have looked at the lived experience of gender for plurisexual women through focusing on gender expression in fashion, and how individuals both desire to and attempt to present their sexualities through their sartorial expression, particularly based on context and ongoing romantic relationships (Hayfield *et al.*, 2013; Daly, King and Yeadon-Lee, 2018; Hayfield, Campbell and Reed, 2018). The work conducted in this field is theoretically sound, however, given the recency of this literature it remains underdeveloped in several ways. The studies conducted into areas of gender primarily focus on the

experience of cis women, and there has not been an active inclusion of different gender identities to see whether the trends identified in gender relations persist across different identities. Furthermore, given that these contributions are article-length and necessarily brief, there has been little engagement with intersecting experiences of plurisexuality based on race or other identity categories in addition to gender. In fact, Muñoz-Laboy actively discusses the need to better incorporate an engagement with race and ethnicity in studying plurisexuality, given that the majority of the scholarship is white-centric (Muñoz-Laboy, 2019). This is emblematic of the field's need to develop a more intersectional perspective. Intersectionality is a concept first developed by Kimberlee Williams Crenshaw to discuss the interlocking systems of oppression that black women experience (Williams Crenshaw, 1991). Intersectionality is a useful conceptual tool in understanding how lived experiences are different based on interlocking systems of oppression that are based on gender, race, disability, religion, nationality, and more. Within sociology, intersectionality has become an extremely important conceptual tool that helps shed light on power dynamics, oppressions, and privileges, leading many sociologists to further develop intersectional toolkits to benefit methodological and theoretical work (Choo and Ferree, 2010; Taylor, Hines and Casey, 2011b). The majority of work relevant to this field of 'new directions in plurisexual study' engages with intersectional theory or intersectional experiences of plurisexuality to an extent, but a more significant engagement is required to be able to best represent plurisexual experiences. However – short of Hayfield's contributions from a Psychology discipline – most of the scholars in this area characterise themselves as sociological in nature, which allows for unpacking the experiences of plurisexuals in relation to dominant norms around sexuality and romance.

Importantly, one text stands out against the background of recent plurisexual work. Monro's 2015 text *Bisexuality: Identity, Politics, and Theories* did not strictly adhere to queer theory; however, it did make use of it in its conceptualisation of plurisexuality. Monro used a combination of queer theory, intersectional theory, interactionism, trans theory, and materialism to effectively discuss the lived experience of plurisexual people. Monro's is the most compelling text to fully flesh out the theoretical direction that we can adopt in understanding plurisexuality. Through merging a variety of theories, Monro drew together a theoretical framework that both troubles the concept of identity categorisations, whilst also paying attention to the complex lived reality that plurisexuals have to inhabit (2015). Monro succinctly summarised her intention in writing her book:

> This book takes bisexuality as its focus because of the academic marginalisation of bisexuality […] which has created a substantial gap in contemporary sexualities literature. The book is needed because bisexuality plays out differently to lesbian and gay identities

> in relation to a number of key process […] for instance, the relationship between hegemonic heterosexualities and non-heterosexualities, sexuality-related prejudices and their material impacts, and the interfaces between individuals and state institutions. Bisexuality raises important issues concerning identity construction and its social and political ramifications […] This book develops theory regarding bisexuality, grounded in analysis of key aspects of bisexual peoples' lives (Monro, 2015, p. 2-3).

The way that Monro has merged a variety of different theories to create a practical, accessible, and accurate theoretical framework through which to study plurisexuality has formed the early inspiration for this PhD. However, I would like to expand upon Monro's work through with the addition of a more developed understanding of gender and the body, which Monro did not specifically discuss in her text at length, yet which Daly et al., Hayfield, Pennington, and Lynch and Maree have understood to be important (Pennington, 2009; Hayfield *et al.*, 2013; Lynch and Maree, 2017; Daly, King and Yeadon-Lee, 2018). The recent developments within plurisexual studies are theoretically engaging and sociologically promising, and this thesis draws together the varying foci of lived experience currently discussed within plurisexual studies to emphasise an ongoing intersectional approach (For examples of intersectional approaches, or approaches which emphasise the influence of a few different identity characteristics, see: Pennington, 2009; Lynch and Maree, 2017; Daly, Kind and Yeadon-Less, 2018; and Monro, 2015). Furthermore, this thesis has actively incorporated a diverse sample in terms of nationality, gender, age, and education that differs from most plurisexuality scholarship that tends to focus on white, middle class, cis women.

3.5 Plurisexuality Scholarship: Strengths and Failings in a Sociological Study of Plurisexuality

At this juncture, it is critical to summarise the overarching argument within this chapter, which is that plurisexuality scholarship has some way to go in developing a theoretical approach that can help a sociological study of plurisexuality. As I will highlight further in the next chapter, gender is of critical importance in understanding plurisexuality and has not been theorised to a sufficient extent within sociological studies. Within the field of plurisexual studies, the four schools of thought I have sketched out are not completely adequate for the sociological theorisation of plurisexual identities. Whilst the life stories school occupies a crucial space in developing a collective consciousness, it fails to demonstrate through empirical studies the scope of the systemic issues at hand. Transcendent scholars establish plurisexuality as an enlightened sexual identity but fail to critically engage with plurisexuality as a culturally located discursive category that must be understood from a sociological perspective. Critical plurisexual studies is the most theoretically engaging, however, this scholarship has not yet parsed theory into sociological empirical work that can demonstrate the impact of its work

on people's lived realities. The new directions observed in plurisexual studies are currently observed in a small body of work, primarily based on articles with few contributing monographs. As a result, this new directions school has not fully woven together intersecting experiences of plurisexuality, however, the emphasis on lived experience is promising and has begun to deliver excellent scholarship.

As I have demonstrated, the first three schools in particular fail to adequately interact with the importance of gender identity in an appropriate way. This thesis seeks to redress this absence through extending the theoretical approach of the critical plurisexual scholars and the new directions scholars. Informed by Monro and other plurisexual scholars, this PhD adopts a queer and feminist approach to interpreting the experiences of real-life plurisexuals living, working, dating, and loving in the United Kingdom. I argue that to understand plurisexual identities and contribute to the wider literature on both sexuality and gender, we must focus on the discursive *and* experiential aspects of discriminated sexual identities and interpret plurisexuality as an embodied sexual identity. The next chapter will unpack more thoroughly my ontological and epistemological approach to this sociological study of plurisexuality.

Chapter 4: Theorising Plurisexualities: Sexual Identity, Lived Experience, Gender, and the Body

4.0 Developing a Theoretical Perspective

The previous chapters have underscored both the need to inquire further into the experiences of plurisexual people from a sociological perspective, as well as the current dearth of understanding surrounding plurisexuality within sexualities scholarship. Much of the scant plurisexual literature that does exist points to the need for an intervention that can benefit plurisexuals who experience significant social discrimination and resultant mental health issues (Weiss, 2003; Barker and Langdridge, 2008; McLean, 2008; Welzer-Lang, 2008; See and Hunt, 2011; Callis, 2013; Walters, Chen and Breiding, 2013; Colledge *et al.*, 2015; Roberts, Horne and Hoyt, 2015). The combination of biphobia, monosexism, and ignorance that affects plurisexuals in day-to-day life applies to academia as well, and must be rectified by actively incorporating plurisexual identities into the field of study (Monro, Hines and Osborne, 2017). The previous chapters demonstrate that sexuality studies lacks sufficient engagement with plurisexuality, whilst plurisexual studies fail to accommodate nuanced understandings of gender that I argue are integral to a full understanding of plurisexuality. Plurisexuality studies have seen excellent scholarship develop, but currently only a few scholars employ a sociological approach to studying the relationship between the plurisexual and society, which is necessary because the categories employed by plurisexuals and societies alike are constructed not by the individual, but by society. Furthermore, plurisexuals are bound to live *in* society, and interact with it, all whilst dominant social norms around sexuality promote cisheteronormativity and monosexism.

With all of this in mind, I argue that the theoretical approach that benefits a sociological intervention into plurisexuality entails an adapted queer theoretical approach. This trans-affirming and plurisexual-centred approach is nuanced by centring the lived experiences of (i) the body, (ii) gender, and (iii) intersectionality. These concepts are artificially separated to be analytically transparent; however, these concepts are continuously interlinked and overlapping in reality, as seen by the ongoing emphasis on the lived experience of these concepts in each description. That is, my discursive separation of the concepts is not intended to obscure the way in which these conceptual categories are reliant on one another for meaning and purpose in one's day-to-day life. However, for the purposes of theoretical clarity I will discuss each concept in turn, beginning firstly with unpacking the benefits of adopting a queer theoretical perspective before explaining my theoretical focus on the categories listed above. This chapter intends not only to explain my understanding of how to study (pluri)sexuality, but also to contribute to the development of a more nuanced queer theoretical perspective that can be more easily adopted in empirical sociological enquiry.

4.1 The Tenets of Queer Theory

As has already been highlighted, queer theory has often failed to engage adequately with plurisexuality, usually due to omitting plurisexuality from its analytic focus. Although queer theory has not thoroughly engaged with plurisexuality outside of works like Hemmings and Angelides bi-specific pieces (Angelides, 2001; Hemmings, 2002), and has often been described as too deconstructionist to work in a sociological study (Green, 2007), I believe an adapted queer theoretical approach can be a useful way of studying plurisexuality sociologically. Prior to nuanced adaptation I contribute in support of a queer sociological study, I shall expand on current queer theoretical assumptions.

Queer theory, as diverse and contingent as the school of thought can be, commonly adopts a number of assumptions. Queer theory is primarily a deconstructive and/or subversive school of thought, intended to radically question institutions and knowledge bases. This is seen in foundational works such as Butler's *Gender Trouble,* where she interrogates both gender binaries and heteronormative systems (Butler, 2007) or in Sedgwick's *Epistemology of the Closet*, who writes that the binary sexual identity opposition is simplistic and problematic and therefore must be deconstructed (Sedgwick, 2008). As a result, much of the queer theoretical tradition suggests that categories, language, and identity are inherently restrictive discursive tools used to limit self-expression. This is seen in how identities such as 'man' or 'woman' create an ideal of how a person should behave, where a 'woman' may wear certain types of clothes, act passively, and be 'ladylike'. However, due to the illusory and contingent nature of identity, which is ultimately built on nothing but discourse, no one can ever wholly perform the identity that they strive towards. Butler describes this fear of failure in performing one's identities at length, describing how those who fail may be seen as outcasts or alienated due to their inability to respond adequately to social pressures around identity (Butler, 2007). Those who are alienated or ostracised occupy what Butler calls an *unlivable life,* where they are not recognised or accommodated socially due to their inability/unwillingness to follow socially mandated forms of expression (Butler, 2007). Performing one's identities is done through rituals, discourse, gesture, dress, and other modes. This performance is often unconscious and based on the pressure of social norms, conditioning, and discourse, which have created an internal concept of how/who one should be. Ultimately, with many of these assumptions in mind, queer theory's purpose is to deconstruct, critique, question, and subvert accepted tropes and norms of gender and sexuality in language, society, and identity. This radical approach seeks to question and undo categories and identities to allow greater room for experience without pressure to fit into social identities and norms.

Of course, the very act of naming some assumptions around queer theory is in itself against the intention of queer theory given that it desires to be nebulous, twisting, and with multiple different

interpretations (Browne and Nash, 2010). Many scholars adopt queer theory in different ways and to different extents. In considering queer theory, Green identified two primary schools of queer theory; that of deconstruction, and that of subversion. He wrote:

> radical deconstructionism glosses over the ways in which sexual classifications are embodied in institutions and social roles, and thus under-theorizes their role as a principal axis of social organization. Similarly, […] radical subversion, neglects the shared social contexts in which sexual actors are socialized, and thus obscures the complexity of sexual marginality and its attachment to other institutionalized identities and social roles (Green, 2002, p.539).

Green's nuanced critiques are important to consider in understanding the limits of a queer theoretical approach. These critiques are relatively consistent about the queer theoretical tradition, with some vocal critics suggesting that the subversive and deconstructive nature of queer theory and politics serves only to efface LGTBQ+ people from discussions/institutions by deconstructing all identities, accidentally reverting to heteronormativity as a frame of reference (Halperin, 2003). I tend to agree with the dangers of effacing all forms of categorisations and identities in the current homophobic, transphobic, biphobic climate within which academia and activism operate. The queer utopic vision of a world without categories and labels is an ideal one, however, intentional inclusion and strategic uses of categories are necessary to incorporate LGBTQ+ into institutions and provide a basic level of human safety and protection, given that murders and assaults can occur directly related to a person's sexuality or gender (noted in the legal categorisation of hate crimes). As a result, I use categorisations of identities in this study - such as plurisexual, cis, trans, non binary – in an attempt to demonstrate the inadequate social support that currently exists for these identities. What is at the core of this is the knowledge that gender and the body *matter* for individuals. Categorisation is often necessary due to the tendency of people to ascribe characteristics to certain types of bodies. To explore the way in which I argue queer theory should be best nuanced, I will discuss the body, gender, and identity labels.

4.2 The Body: Experiencing, Relating, and Visibility

The body operates as the location of our experiences. Our bodies affect our experiences due to our lived experiences. Physical sensation and emotions have physiological effects on our body such as blushing, crying, orgasming, or muscular tension. Physical changes that bodies may undergo include pregnancy, menstruation, menopause, fractures, baldness, heart disease, and disability. These physical experiences are integral to our personal and social experiences of the world. Our bodies are

the primary location of our experiences, and as Oakley suggests, a primary way in which we come to understand our self-identity:

> The bodies that we're born with, or into, are accidents: unforeseeable chance results of genes, environment, history, time and place. We don't choose our bodies, nor much of what happens to them. But it's difficult to separate the fate of the body and of the self: the two are tied together in the resistance of the body's corporeality, this material package of blood, flesh and bones, wrapped up in human skin (Oakley, 2007).

The bodies that we are in feel certain ways, look certain ways, and can do certain things, and we base social identities on our body. Understanding how others perceive our race, gender, sexuality, or levels of ability, are all tied into understanding the way in which we can occupy our own body in a wider social world.

The role of the body, critical in wider feminist theory, has seldom been integrated into studying plurisexuality. Monro, a contemporary scholar of plurisexuality, discusses the importance of the body in her theoretical approach in *Bisexuality: Identity, Politics, and Theories* (2015). She writes that:

> the material forces that shape people's lives include not only economic forces, and gender, race, ability-related, age-related inequalities and the social structures that support these, but also bodily 'realities', including aging, bodily limitations, and mortality (Monro 2015, p.51).

Although Monro draws on the importance of the body, she does not comprehensively conceptualise the specific ways in which the body could be studied as part of plurisexual scholarship. Given the importance of the body in understanding experience, and given other plurisexual scholars' (Daly, King and Yeadon-Lee, 2018, Pennington, 2009; Hayfield *et al.*, 2013; Monro, 2015; Lynch and Maree, 2017; Muñoz-Laboy, 2019) encouragement to incorporate bodily experience, this section explores how we may understand the body in this study. In brief:

- The body is the location of our experiences, the way in which we experience our world, and we must adopt a phenomenological approach to understanding the body in this context.

- The body is a significant way in which we communicate our identities and selves to others. We attempt to show others things about ourselves through using the body, gesture, and sartorial expression.
- Although we experience our body in one way, and communicate it in another, our body enters into a social world where it may be ascribed identities or characteristics that we disagree with.

Chapter 2 already made reference to *Queer Phenomenology,* Ahmed's text that makes use of phenomenology and the substance of the body in terms of how we orientate ourselves in the world. In Ahmed's view, bodies matter in terms of how we face the world, as – in the case of queer people – the interaction of bodies differs from heteronormative social ideals, leading to social consequences for those who are queer. In essence, our bodies' desires and the interactions between our bodies and others directly affect the identities we can hold in the social world. The repetition of actions, movements, and desires performed through and with our bodies affect our identities and the ways in which we move through the world. This is a useful theoretical perspective to consider in the context of plurisexuality, where plurisexual individuals' bodies may be attuned to multiple different genders, thus fulfilling heteronormative ideals of different-gender attraction whilst also opposing them with a simultaneous same-gender attraction. The way in which plurisexuals orient their bodies at different times to different genders is therefore phenomenologically significant in the context of Ahmed's work. Ahmed's queer phenomenology, however, is primarily concerned with how bodies are received by others as opposed to how we are able to manage our bodies ourselves, and this must be further unpacked with the addition of more theoretical perspectives. This focus on the self-regulation of the body and its expression to others is a significant piece within this PhD study. To understand this, it is useful to elaborate on concepts relating to the body through considering corporeal realism and 'fleshy socialty.'

Corporeal realism is useful to understand how one's agency affects our bodies; that is, through using both theories we can recognise the dual interaction of the body on our identities, and our identities on our bodies. In the age of modernity we are able to control our bodies to a degree never seen before (Shilling, 1993). With the advent of cosmetic surgery, sports, dentistry, diet, medicine and consumer fashion, we are able to adapt and change our bodies to reflect social ideals or communicate our personal identities (Shilling, 1993). Of course, "bodies are constraining as well as facilitating" because of lived experiences we may not be able to change stemming from realities such as age, disease, ability, race, and more (Shilling 1993, p.8). Our identities and adaptation to the world stems from our ability to appropriately transform our bodies, use our bodies, and interact with other bodies in a social context. Shilling describes the way in which individuals approach their bodies as a "project which should be worked at and accomplished as part of an individual's self-identity" (Shilling 1993,

p.5). In this way, bodies can – to an extent - be shaped to reflect a particular identity. Whether this means losing weight, wearing one's hair a certain way, acting or behaving in a particular way, all of it adds up to our control over our bodies to communicate our self-identities in a social context based on socio-cultural norms. However, importantly our bodies also act as constraints affecting our self-identities, in terms of whether we identify as white, woman, disabled, queer, and more; all of these identities stem from our body. Thus, we can see that the experience of the body and the adaptation of the body can interact to reflect or betray different identities. Separating the mind (or self) from the body is inevitably a failed project given the influence they have on one another, and the role that ascribed characteristics play in a social context (Grosz, 1994; Bailey, 1999; Wennerstrom, 2000; Butler, 2007; Oakley, 2007; Murugami, 2009). Of course, the categories that we have created, whether gender, race, ability or otherwise, are socially constructed categories, demonstrating the importance of analysing the social world when thinking about bodies and identities. In essence, corporeal realism emphasises the importance of the connection between the body and identity in creating a form that we wish to occupy and communicate with in a social world. In relation to sexuality, numerous studies have discussed how movement, gesture, and fashion are used by LGBTQ+ people to communicate their sexual identities to others around them (Cleto, 1999; Taylor, 2007, 2008; Woolfe, 2009; McCann, 2018). This is critical to understanding plurisexuality given the fact that studies have demonstrated that plurisexual women attempt to communicate their identities using differing sartorial expressions, so that they can be 'read' by others as being plurisexual (Hartman, 2013; Hayfield *et al.*, 2013; Hartman-Linck, 2014). Corporal realism can thus be used to understand the agency we use in fashioning our identities and communicating things about ourselves.

Bringing together a queer phenomenology and corporeal realism leads us on to the necessity to locate the body within the wider social context – or, as Ahmed & Stacey (2001) term it – a 'fleshy sociality'. Within the social world, there is a hierarchy of types of bodies and identities. Within this hierarchy, able-bodied people are preferred to disabled people, one's own ethnicity is preferred to other ethnicities, gender conforming people are better accepted than gender non-conforming people (Lynn and Lea, 2003; Lombardi, 2009; Hodge and Runswick-Cole, 2013). In this way, fleshy sociality demonstrates that bodies do not pass unencumbered in the social world due to the:

> emphasis on embodiment, not only as fleshy and material but also as 'worldly', as being in an intimate and living relationship to the world which is a world made up of other bodies (Ahmed & Stacey 2001, p.5).

That is, our bodies mean something in a social context. Some identities and characteristics are ascribed based on how people interpret other people's bodies, clothes, and actions (e.g. woman/man, black/white, disabled/able-bodied, cis/trans, rich/poor, gay/straight). When these identities are recognised or understood in a social context, there can be positive or negative consequences dependent on the social context. For example, if a camp gay man were to attend a conservative event, he may be ostracised, mocked, subject to violence, or treated as a curiosity. Similarly, if a disabled person were to attend an able-bodied space, they may be treated as vulnerable, weak, or in need of assistance. Consequently, where bodies are interpreted by others in a social context, social interactions play out in ways that are sometimes uncontrollable to individuals, as they are enacted on the basis of one's physicality. In essence:

> the body is not simply constrained by or invested with social relations, but also actually forms a basis for and contributes towards these relations (Shilling 1993, p.13).

This fleshy sociality means that we must understand that our bodies respond to and are responded to differently based on others' identities and social contexts. Our bodies, unfortunately, are not unencumbered vessels for our consciousness – rather our bodies mean something and affect our experiences very directly. In understanding plurisexuality, this becomes important as different genders can sometimes have different kinds of sex with one another. What is considered sexually transgressive between a cis man and a cis woman (for example, men receiving anal sex) may be considered par for the course in sex between two cis men. The social contexts we build around our bodies matter, and this is important to recognise in studying plurisexuality in society.

Through conceptualising the body with queer phenomenology, corporal realism, and 'fleshy sociality', we can build up a multi-layered interpretation of the way in which we navigate the world in our bodies. This approach has not been clearly articulated in previous plurisexual scholarship, with the majority of plurisexual scholarship adopting a disembodied approach which emphasises the cultural role of plurisexuality as opposed to the lived experience of being plurisexual and occupying space in society - this absence of the body limits our understanding of plurisexual experiences.

It is important to conceptualise plurisexuality as a bodily experience as plurisexual physical experiences matter; plurisexuals often have sex and romances where their body and the resultant social and emotional consequences of occupying certain body types matter. For example, a man may typically enjoy receiving anal sex with other men, but if he sleeps with a woman, the normative expectations around sex may make receiving anal sex a more complicated discussion. It is noted

elsewhere that one's sexual agency and role changes based on one's experience and one's partner, and that gender plays an important role in determining the way a person engages in sex acts (Albanesi, 2009). The interplay between a plurisexual identity and the way in which a plurisexual determines which sex acts to engage in with different bodies demonstrates that bodies matter. Furthermore, plurisexual bodies are 'read' differently to monosexual bodies, as either heterosexual or gay/lesbian based on the gender of the partner that they are seen with. In addition, plurisexuals are ascribed genders and sexualities based on visual cues relating to fashion and gesture. Finally, plurisexuals are known to have issues relating to their bodies in terms of addiction, being subject to violence, and experiencing mental health problems including eating problems (Jorm *et al.*, 2002; Barker *et al.*, 2008; Steele *et al.*, 2009; Colledge *et al.*, 2015). The acknowledgement of the body is consequently helpful in enabling us to talk and recognise these concerns and how they relate to a plurisexual experience.

4.3 Gender: Socialising, Embodying, and Performing

The body has already been discussed as an important site for interpreting plurisexual experiences. However, it is important to focus specifically on gender as a critical site, both as an identity, and an embodied phenomenon. As Gilbert writes:

> gender rules cover everything we do and say, and they do so without seeming as if we are being coerced or that we are even making choices (Gilbert, 2009; p.94).

Gender is often interpreted as a characteristic tied to the body although, in reality, there is a significant socio-cultural element to gender that we need to understand. In the context of studying plurisexuality it is likely that gender will be the most salient characteristic, which is key to interpreting plurisexual experiences. Previous plurisexual scholarship has tended to minimise the role of gender, with theorists such as Garber (1997) suggesting that plurisexuals are gender-blind, or that gender does not play an important role in plurisexuality. I argue that this is false, and that gender plays a role in the construction of plurisexuality, the lives of plurisexuals, and in particular, in the romantic relationships of plurisexuals. To theorise plurisexuality, I will show how gender is (i) socialised through social roles and gender expectations, (ii) embodied through fashion, weight management, and behaviour, and (iii) performed according to cultural expectations and limitations of our own bodies in social contexts. I will discuss these before moving on to discuss how gender and plurisexuality specifically connect, and then how trans and non binary bodies fit into concepts of gender, before relating the importance of gender specifically to plurisexuality.

Gender is socialised - although that is not to say that it is entirely illusory, as the lived experiences of gender matter, particularly amongst trans and non binary individuals. However, the construction of gender in society suggests that there is an essential and biological connection between women and passivity, kindness, feelings of maternity, and domesticity, whilst men are aggressive, forthright, leaders, and inherently sexual (West and Zimmerman, 1987). These gender expectations form an idealised gender which we can perform and copy, though never quite replicate (Butler, 2007). As a consequence, we are destined never adequately to demonstrate our gender and constantly be in peril of failure, leading to a culture in which gender policing occurs to ensure people are as appropriately masculine or appropriately feminine as possible (Butler, 2007). Being appropriately masculine or feminine means not only adopting the above gender personality characteristics, but also means being in a heterosexual, monogamous, monosexual relationship with the ultimate ideal of forming a nuclear family (Butler, 2007). According to Butler, the only way in which these expectations and constraints can be relaxed is through witnessing a greater multiplicity of differently gendered people across society (Butler, 2007). However, due to the socialisation of gender, being non binary, trans or intersex poses significant risks to the individual. The social expectations of gender are policed to the extent that anyone transgressing or transitioning is seen as a threat, or a trickster who requires punishment (Serano, 2007).

Connected to the socialisation of gender is the embodiment of gender. We consciously and unconsciously embody masculine and feminine traits dependent on where we are and what we need to do, thus allowing ourselves to fit into a hegemony of gender, where masculine men and feminine women are most prized. As Jackson writes, gender is:

> one of the first social categories a child learns, that forms the foundation for the ways in which we locate ourselves within a gendered sexual order and make sense of ourselves as embodied, gendered, and sexual beings […] we acquire a sense of ourselves as gendered long before we become reflexively aware of ourselves as sexual (Jackson 2009, p.153).

Different contexts affect the way in which we perform our gender, either consciously or unconsciously, dependent on our safety and what is considered appropriate (Messerschmidt, 2009). Furthermore, our relationship with gender can be embodied; men may grow larger and more muscular to demonstrate their masculinity, whilst women may shrink and lose weight to demonstrate their desirability and passivity (Messerschmidt, 2009). This embodiment can also be behavioural, for example, men are expected to be heterosexually active, whilst women are expected to be sexually

attractive to men (Jackson, 2009). It is notable that these gender performances and embodiments are limited by the two-gender system as there are hundreds of variations on the theme of gender, with some people identifying as women but being far more masculine presenting and vice versa (Harris and Crocker, 1997; Cleto, 1999; Halberstam, 1999; Richards, Bouman and Barker, 2017). Non binary and trans identities are not adequately represented in the two-gender system, demonstrating its cisnormative and transphobic fallibility. Through 'failing' at an appropriate gender (for example, not being cis), Butler argues that the embodiment of gender becomes unintelligible in social contexts, leading to unlivable lives where gender 'deviants' are targeted, policed, harassed and excluded in social contexts (Butler, 2007). In essence, "the body is a participant in shaping and generating social practice and, consequently, it is impossible to consider human agency without taking embodied gender into account" (Messerschmidt 2009, p.87).

Although socialised and embodied, gender is incorporated into a social structure where gender must be adequately performed. Gender has an external role that holds significant importance in the social context. Adopting appropriate gender roles in social contexts facilitates successful interactions with others (Goffman, 1990; Butler, 2007). For individuals who fail to adhere to conventional gender norms, such as LGBTQ+ people, there is the threat of violence, alienation, or social isolation (Halberstam, 1999, 2005; Butler, 2007; Serano, 2007). Gender norms, which celebrate and encourage femininity and masculinity in a two-gender system, also enforce a compulsory heterosexuality, whereby individuals are expected to be attracted to their 'opposite-gender' (Rich, 1980; Butler, 2007). LGBTQ+ deviations from compulsory heterosexuality are punished socially and in one's lived experience (Rich, 1980; Butler, 2007). Furthermore, the constraint of gender roles and compulsory heterosexuality reinforces a conservative approach to relationships which celebrates monogamy, reproduction, and marriage (Butler, 2007). In these ways, there are rigorous external and social expectations for individual and coupled performances of gender and sexuality. Failing to appropriately adopt gender norms, failing to appropriately pair with an 'opposite-gender' partner, and failing to adhere to a conservative model of a relationship is punishable by social isolation, violence, and alienation. LGBTQ+ identities adopt different gender expressions, and place themselves as 'outsiders' from heterosexuality (Eves, 2004; Hayfield et al., 2013; McCann, 2018). However, as an 'outsider' one is read as lesbian or gay due to monosexism, concealing the possibility of being seen as plurisexual. In this way, heteronormativity and monosexism come together through gender and sexual expression, establishing a dichotomy for plurisexuals who can then either present as gay/lesbian or heterosexual, or attempt a plurisexual gender and sexual expression that will most likely be misunderstood.

Gender and (Pluri)sexuality

Gender is thus socialised, embodied, and performed. However, I wish to take a moment to emphasise the importance of gender in relation to plurisexuality before discussing the salience of the gender binary in relation to trans and non binary people. A limited amount of studies look into plurisexual visibility from many disciplinary perspectives, particularly psychological, sociological, and cultural research. Many lesbian and gay people 'queer code' to express their sexuality and build community (Krakauer and Rose, 2002; Hutson, 2010). Queer coding here means the way in which LGBTQ+ people manage their dress, gesture, and actions to communicate a sexuality that is not heterosexual. Those who do not fit what is expected in LGBTQ+ culture find themselves excluded from the 'community' on the basis of their appearance – for example on the basis of being an overtly feminine cis lesbian or bisexual woman, or through being working class as opposed to middle class (Vannewkirk, 2006; Taylor, 2007, 2008). Plurisexuals are unfortunate in that they do not have a series of queer codes to draw on to present their identities (Clarke and Turner, 2007; Clarke and Spence, 2013; Hayfield et al., 2013) and the general population often cannot describe what a plurisexual may look like even when they can suggest what a lesbian looks like (Hayfield et al., 2013). British-based research has recently found that bisexual women use femininity and masculinity to communicate their identities, often changing the way they choose to appear based on the gender of their partner at the time (Daly, King and Yeadon-Lee, 2018). Similarly, a South African study found that bisexual women use and subvert gender norms to resist hetero-gendered expectations (Lynch and Maree, 2017). It is apparent that for both LGBTQ+ identities and plurisexual identities alike, gender-based visual norms of dress, gesture, and action form cornerstones of sexual self-expression. This thesis illustrates how these norms affect not only cis women, but also cis men, trans men, trans women, and non binary people, whilst also focusing on the production of cisnormativity in society.

Although there is a limit to the ways in which plurisexual people might express themselves due primarily to a lack of recognition, it is important to attempt to understand how plurisexuals try to represent themselves. Additionally, it is important to contextualise this plurisexual presentation in terms of whether they behave differently when entering into perceived heterosexual or lesbian/gay spaces. It is important to consider the navigation between spaces as a journey, as – too often – plurisexuals are interpreted as half-gay/half-straight as opposed to expressing complete identities in and of themselves. For example, when in same or similar gender relationships, plurisexual people will encounter homophobic reactions. Although this homophobia can be avoided when plurisexual people partner with different genders, they then are at risk of coming up against heterophobia from the LGBTQ+ community. Plurisexuals have to navigate the range of these experiences consistently and constantly, reiterating that they are not half-gay/half-straight, but rather that they are continually

managing their experiences and reception as a whole plurisexual person. In dating men, non binary people, and women, plurisexuals switch across acceptable and unacceptable social points and must therefore consider their visibility and sense of presentation. As monosexism means that plurisexuals will most likely be interpreted as gay or lesbian, visibility is a privilege for plurisexuals due to the associated recognition and validation.

The LGBTQ+ subculture presents alternative forms of presentation, expression, and behaviour for LGBTQ+ people. These diverse gender presentations offer ways of playing with masculinity and femininity that disturb dominant gender norms. However, importantly, these new expressions come not only with physical expectations, but also with behavioural expectations, for example butch women are expected to be tough and emotionless, whilst camp men are often considered to be more feminine (Cleto, 1999; Halberstam, 1999). Although expectations and labels establish new norms to adhere to, the diverse range of options within the LGBTQ+ subculture offers opportunities for individuals to express themselves. Importantly, the way in which LGBTQ+ people dress is often used as a form of communication regarding sexuality, behaviour, and relationship expectations, or a way in which people are stereotyped by others (Halberstam, 1999). Femme presenting women within LGBTQ+ circles are often assumed to be heterosexual due to their adherence to traditional gender norms in terms of their dress, suggesting femmes are disenfranchised of their LGBTQ+ identities (Harris and Crocker, 1997). For gay and plurisexual men, the most evident gender deviation is that of campness, which Bergman describes:

> First, everyone agrees that camp is a style (whether of objects or of the way objects are perceived is debated) that favours ‘exaggeration’, ‘artifice’, and ‘extremity’. Second, camp exists in tension with popular culture, commercial culture, or consumerist culture. Third, the person who can recognize camp, who sees things as campy, or who can camp is a person outside the cultural mainstream. Fourth, camp is affiliated with homosexual culture, or at least with a self-conscious eroticism that throws into question the naturalisation of desire” (Bergman 1993 qtd in Cleto 1999, p.4-5).

Key to this analysis of gender as an external performance is Bergman’s suggestion that to perform campness (or gender deviation) is to be outside of the mainstream. Visual appearance is a key element in LGBTQ+ subculture that allows for communication of desire and a sense of solidarity. However, looking LGBTQ+ is not for every LGBTQ+ person. With the growing rejection of dominant gender norms in mainstream society, more heterosexual women are adopting traditional LGBTQ+ self-imagery, such as short haircuts, body hair, plaid shirts and feminist iconography. This blurring of subculture and dominant culture means that visual expression does not necessarily reflect a sexuality

or individual politics, and to assume visual expression is the direct reflection of one's sexuality can result in harmful stereotyping (Woolfe, 2009). The critical point here is that external presentations of gender and gender play matter for LGBTQ+ people and can be a form of communication amongst LGBTQ+ people.

Gender Binaries: Trans and Non Binary Experiences

Importantly, for trans plurisexuals, visibility may not be considered a privilege as to be recognised as trans is to be put in danger in most situations due to social transphobia. When considering non binary plurisexuals, the question becomes further complicated where visibility could also result in violence, but could also validate a non binary persons' complicated relationship with the gender binary. There are ongoing activist movements to increase the visibility and recognition of non binary, trans and intersex genders (Fausto-Sterling, 2000; Serano, 2007; Bergman and Barker, 2017). As Gilbert writes:

> by codifying the distinction between male and female, man and woman, masculine and feminine, [the gender binary] creates a virulently sexist, heterosexist, and transphobic culture (Gilbert, 2009; p.103).

Beyond the fact that our gender system mandates heteronormative, strictly gendered roles for the majority of individuals, this system (or cistem as it should more appropriately be termed) also mandates that people are cis gender through promoting cisnormativity. Cisnormativity revolves around the idea that it is more 'acceptable' to be cis than trans (Worthen, 2016). As a system of belief, cisnormativity jeopardises the safety of trans people, with American trans women of colour disproportionately being murdered compared to cis people, significantly high rates of homelessness amongst trans people compared to cis people, and significantly increased levels of intimate partner violence against trans people (Human Rights Campaign, 2018). Gender and gender expression is extraordinarily salient in the study of sexual identities, as gender forms the basis for social organisation. In order to best explore the restrictions of the cistem and cisnormativity, as well as the problematic expectations associated with heteronormative gender expectations, trans and non binary voices and experiences must take centre stage in any gender-based analysis.

An analysis of gender would not be complete without including trans and non binary bodies. These bodies, falling outside of the dominant cisnormative two-gender system, present a threat to dominant gender norms (although many binary trans people fight to be included in the two-gender binary). Living as trans/non binary is difficult given that the discursive limits of society have not

constructed a third (or fourth, or fifth…) gender, and consequently those outside of the cis man/woman binary are socially unintelligible and face the pain of social recrimination and violence (Butler, 1993a). Trans and/or non binary people are seen as a threat to the very foundation of society due to their deviance from cis gender, heterosexual social ideals (Butler, 2007; Serano, 2007). These social conditions have impacted on the lived experiences of trans, non binary and intersex people, from intersex children being forced into corrective genital surgery (Fausto-Sterling, 2000), to trans people being denied medical care due to doctor prejudice (Feinberg, 2009), to trans, non binary and intersex people fielding questions on subjects including their genitalia, bathroom usage, medical background and more (Skolnik and Anonymous, 2009). Living as trans and/or non binary requires a simultaneously convincing gender presentation, whilst also being completely open-handed and honest in responding to questions. Trans people in particular are often seen as 'tricking' partners and society at large, an example of this being when Brandon Teena was horrifically raped and murdered, with defendants arguing that they were 'tricked' by Teena (Halberstam, 2005). Prior to his murder, Teena had sought police help based on his later-murderers acting intimidatingly towards him, however, during investigations, Sheriff Charles B Laux focused on Teena's gender in an overly intimate way, leading Teena to stop engaging with the police. Some trans and/or non binary people use their identities as a revolutionary explosion of gender, sexuality, and values in dominant society. As Feinberg writes, through being trans:

> we expand understanding of how many ways there are to be a human being. Our lives are proof that sex and gender are much more complex than a delivery room doctor's glance at genitals can determine, more variegated than pink or blue birth caps. We are oppressed for not fitting those narrow social norms. We are fighting back (Feinberg 2009, p.550).

Many trans and non binary people can destabilise gender and sexuality expectations. However, it should not be an onus or expectation on the trans or non binary body to hold this revolutionary position; many wish to simply live without comment and without acting on behalf of a gender revolution. Hines has explored the varieties of ways that trans people negotiate their identities, concluding that trans people have particularities in their sense and expression of gender based on generation, social understandings, cultural belongings, length of transition period, and medical choices (Hines 2006b). Further, Hines' work has illustrated how these particularities of understanding may transform based on contingent social contexts where trans identities may be constrained or negotiated differently in different environments (Hines 2010a).

In summary, gender becomes a critical point of understanding sexuality. The connection between gender, sexuality, safety, and representation cannot be understated. In order to fully explore a plurisexual experience, it is critical to highlight the sexual experiences and relations of a variety of different genders, and understand what gender means for each individual in the context of sexuality.

4.4 Sexual Identity: Illusory, Social, Subversive

Sexual identity is clearly a critical consideration within this thesis. A useful way of conceptualising sexual identity has been established by plurisexual scholar Monro, using interactionist theory, queer theory, trans theory, and intersectional theory (Monro, 2015). This multi-layered, pragmatic, sociologically-transferable approach posits that plurisexuals navigate their identities in terms of a (potentially) innate desire and the way in which this desire shapes social identities. Additionally, although plurisexuality is a discursively constructed social category that can limit sexual expression, it is politically and sociologically disadvantageous to erase a plurisexual identity further and attempt to move away from this categorisation. Moreover, plurisexuality – as an identity – has the theoretical potential to subvert and expand the binary between different-gender/same-gender attractions. Finally, plurisexuality is not the overarching identity for many people; rather many people experience systemic and systematic interlocking systems of oppression based on how they are racialised and gendered, as well as whether they experience ableism, xenophobia, classism, and other discriminatory social practices/beliefs.

As previously discussed, the interactions between identity, desire, and behaviour do not necessarily align, however, for the purpose of this sociological study, identity is used as the core indicator of plurisexuality as it relates to how others locate themselves in a social world. Monro's approach to studying plurisexuality is similar, highlighting the ways in which plurisexuals navigate interpretations of their own desire and behaviour to arrive at a sexual identity. Monro suggests that this is an inherently socially constructed way of locating oneself, however, this does not obviate the fact that "biology may play a more formative part in the construction of identity" than pure social constructionism (Monro 2015, p.36).

Although acknowledging the potential biological associations related to desire and sexuality, Monro underscores the ways in which plurisexual identities are discursively constructed categorisations of sexuality that have no essential basis, but rather are reflective of a social interpretation of desire and behaviour. This view, common amongst other plurisexual critical theorists (Angelides, 2001; Hemmings, 2002; Gurevich, Bailey and Bower, 2009), indicates the queer theoretical strain in Monro's interpretation of sexual identity. Through acknowledging that identities are problematic and constructed, Monro also draws on Butler's work that discusses how identities are

illusory and impossible given that they refer to an ideal that is unattainable due to the fact that they have been discursively constructed (Butler, 2007; Monro, 2015). Referring to gender, Butler demonstrated the illusory nature of gender identities as they were discursively constructed and served to maintain feminised and masculinised ways of being and code behaviour to reinforce a heteronormative gender binary. Butler's discussion on the performativity of gender can be applied to understanding the limits of sexual identities:

> [I]f gender is constructed, it is not necessarily constructed by an "I" or a "we" who stands before that construction in any spatial or temporal sense of "before." Indeed, it is unclear that there can be an "I" or a "we" who has not been submitted, subjected to gender, where gendering is, among other things, the differentiating relations by which speaking subjects come into being. Subjected to gender, but subjectivated by gender, the "I" neither precedes nor follows the process of this gendering, but emerges only within and as the matrix of gender relations themselves (Butler 2007 p.7).

Butler writes that there is no selfhood prior to socially recognised language - what 'we' are, is what 'we' are recognised as. This recognition is untrue, as there is nothing of us prior to language, and also imposes a limitation on the possibilities of what we could be. That is, through claiming oneself to be a 'man' or a 'woman', we are inevitably positing ourselves as a socially recognisable characteristic, which we attach social meaning and recognition to. Thus, to be a woman is not just to be a woman, but to adhere to societal gender norms surrounding femininity of dress, attitude, and gesture. Butler argues that this type of identification and presentation is unconscious and unintended, nonetheless it is a performative action which we are all implicated in due to our adherence to social identities and codes. Butler demonstrates how through conceptualising two genders, we allow for a system of heteronormativity whereby the attraction of 'opposite' genders is inevitable and natural, thus demonstrating that any same-gender pairings must be incorrect due to the complimentary oppositional construction of men and women. Monro's view of the limits of identities and the usage of queer theory is transposed into a plurisexual context to argue that:

> [Queer theory] has a place [in theorising plurisexuality], particularly in allowing for analysis of transgressive identities, and multiple, fluid desires. The critiques of the approach are clearly pertinent to bisexuality, in particular the vanguardist, elitist, and classed tendencies associated with it, and the tendency for bisexual experiences to be erased or marginalised within a broader 'queer' set of identities (Monro 2015, p.47).

In this sense, Monro directly draws on Butler's notions around the performativity of gender to apply them to the way in which sexual identities are mobilised in the social world. Although Monro recognises the positives and negatives of using queer theory in studying plurisexuality, she also recognises that some plurisexually-behaving individuals identify as queer on an individual level, "making the inclusion of queer theory important within an analysis of bisexuality that centres bisexual people's experiences" (Monro 2015, p.47).

Trans Theory and Labels in Plurisexuality

In discussing the role plurisexuality can take in subverting and expanding binaries of same-gender/different-gender attractions, Monro refers to trans theory, which tends to fall into three different approaches in her view. Firstly, trans theory attempted to expand categorisations of gender through adding different gender identities to the mix (i.e. man, woman, genderqueer). Secondly, trans theory attempted to dissolve the concept of gender entirely, through highlighting how gender was a drag. Thirdly, trans theory adopted the pluralistic view of gender as something that occurs on a spectrum of existence, where individuals can be more masculine or feminine or anywhere in between. Monro highlights this third approach as the most productive way of subverting binaries as it allows for all individuals to identify as they wish, whilst also recognising the slippage between categories and the myriad identities and ways of being available to the individual. Monro believes that plurisexuality, too, can adopt this way of theorising sexual identity as:

> [gender-pluralist type theories] allow for conceptualising physiological sex, gender, and sexual identity in finely gained, fluid, and complex ways without some of the transgressive baggage that limits queer theory (Monro 2015, p.50).

In this sense, Monro's mediation between queer theory and trans theory simultaneously deconstructs, subverts, and repositions identities in a way that allows them to interact with one another for the purpose of querying identities and binaries. This enables plurisexuality to take a central position in the inquiry of sexuality, and consequently redress monosexist academia that has failed to adequately incorporate plurisexuality as a topic of study.

In essence, Monro's theoretical contribution to how to theorise and incorporate understandings of sexual identities in a study of plurisexuality are extremely relevant. Through emphasising lived experience, flexible discursive labels, and the potential political impact of label usage, Monro's theoretical suggestions form an emancipatory scholarship that centres pragmatism and lived experience in an academic study of plurisexuals. By that, I mean that Monro's theoretical

suggestions allow plurisexuals to continue to identify as such, communicating their identities, and existing in a material reality. Through this, Monro's work attempts to centre plurisexual experiences explicitly, positioning itself as an emancipatory engagement with plurisexual identity.

4.5 Intersectional Theory and Labels in Plurisexuality

Intersectionality also forms a key theoretical concern within this thesis. Sexuality scholars have long been concerned with the usage of intersectionality in sexuality studies, arguing that the theoretical links between intersectionality and sexuality studies have not been developed enough (Taylor, Hines and Casey, 2011b). As Taylor et al. purport:

> A concern with sexuality is apparent within scholarly work on 'intersectionality' as a spoke on the 'intersectional wheel', but these intersections are often minimally gestured towards rather than empirically substantiated, demonstrated, and 'delivered'; the formalistic addition and repetition of 'intersectionality' leaves out the intimate interconnections, mutual constitutions and messiness of everyday identifications and lived experiences (Taylor, Hines and Casey, 2011a, p.2).

That is, intersectionality has not been adequately theorised within sexuality studies to understand how various interlocking systems of oppression affect people differently and individually in their day-to-day lives, as opposed to all 'women' having the same experience, or all 'bisexuals' having the same experience, for example. To address these concerns, this dissertation draws on McCall's paper regarding intersectionality.

McCall's 2005 *The Complexity of Intersectionality* explores various intersectional approaches. McCall first describes anticategorical intersectionality, which is complementary to queer theory in that it attempts to deconstruct identities. In the context of plurisexuality, anticategorical intersectionality "can be used to dismantle […] the assumption that people have fixed, discrete sexual identities, and the assumption that monosexuality is normal" (Monro 2015, p.61). However, Monro writes that the anticategorical approach can be problematic in that through deconstructing categories, it is common to fall back to a grand narrative which recentres a dominant category as its epistemological and ontological base, failing to give focused and careful space to different categories through omission and lack of care. This is a contentious point, as Hines has argued that:

> Anti-categorical complexity need not inherently be oppositional to a material analysis or a politics of redistribution. Rather, such a framework can bring to light the ways in which power relations are discursively and materially embedded in identity categories […] Rather than discounting subjective investments in identity, then, an anti-categorical approach may productively bring to light identities which have been previously marginalised within gender or sexual binary frameworks (Hines, 2011, p.145).

Anti-categorical intersectionality is opposed to what McCall calls intercategorical intersectionality, which is more material in terms of recognising how power, access, and resources, are unequally shared amongst gendered, racialised, and ethnic lines (and other inequalities). This approach is useful in terms of recognising that using the term plurisexual can be strategically useful in political discussions to demonstrate the need for equality and resources. Finally, McCall describes intracategorical intersectionality, which is best summarised in the following quote:

> intracategorical complexity inaugurated the study of intersectionality … it falls conceptually in the middle of the continuum between the first approach [anticategorical], which rejects categories, and the third approach [intercategorical], which uses them strategically. Like the first approach, it interrogates the boundary-making and boundary-defining process itself, though that is not its raison d'etre. Like the third approach, it acknowledges the stable and even durable relationships that social categories represent at any given point in time, though it also maintains a critical stance toward categories. This approach is called intracategorical complexity because authors working in this vein tend to focus on particular social groups at neglected points of intersection (McCall 2005, p.1771).

In terms of studying plurisexuality, Monro highlights the way in which intracategorical intersectionality can look within plurisexual groups to demonstrate the variance in identities and privilege amongst plurisexuals, whilst also exploring identities which do not necessarily fit with monosexist/normative understandings of sexed and gendered behaviour. In the study of plurisexuality, it seems most appropriate to use intracategorical intersectionality, which remains suspicious of all categories whilst understanding the need to use them strategically to create a material difference in the world. This is critical in interpreting plurisexuality given that, as discussed in Chapter 3, there is a significant failure to study, recognise, or address the different experiences of plurisexuals who are not white middle-class women. In the context of this dissertation, I have considered the variety of identities that people connect with and relate to in terms of how it may impact their experiences of both plurisexuality and gender.

In summary, given the consistent recognition of the limitations of current research, and the lack of research into certain identities, it is critical to adopt an intersectional approach in studying plurisexual identities. This will not only allow scholars to recognise the limitations of current scholarship, but also allow for a more nuanced understanding of the interlocking systems of oppression that may mean that – dependent on space, context, and surroundings – oppression and discrimination related to plurisexual identities may be of greater or lesser importance in an individual's

life comparative to other identities. Similarly, the interlocking nature of identities may mean that plurisexual people of varying backgrounds have an amplified experience of discrimination if it stems from multiple derided identities.

4.6 Merging Approaches to Intersectionality, Sexual Identity, the Body, and Gender

Developing a queer conceptual approach that aligns with a sociological approach is inherently difficult. As Green summarises:

> With respect to the study of the self, I have argued that the effort to synthesise sociology and queer theory is a perilous venture. On the contrary, I suggest that the very promise of queer theory rests in its strong deconstructionist position, existing in tension with, rather than as an extension of, sociological approaches to the self. Indeed, queer theory is not a theory of the self, but it is a theory surely relevant to selves and the discursive determinants that characterise late modernity (Green, 2007, p.43).

The complex negotiation between deconstructing, subverting, and yet representing the social categories of the self that people identify with and manage themselves in society is troubled by the inclusion of queer theory. However, this thesis follows the lead of other scholars who have worked to bridge queer theory and sociological study such as Hines and Roseneil (Roseneil, 2000; Hines, 2006a, 2006b, 2010a, 2011) who “stress the need to understand gender and sexuality as both socially relational and performatively constructed” (Hines, 2011, p.144). The conceptual framework in this chapter is heavily informed by queer theory in developing a suspicion and interrogation of categories, demonstrating that contemporary social categories omit many people’s experiences, and attempting to expand definitions to be more inclusive of the variety of experiences that people undergo in their lives. At the same time, it is clear that – for many people – categories and identities can be useful ways of relating to one another, for purposes of visibility, validation, representation, and developing community and kinship. With this in mind, informed by queer theory, this conceptual approach interrogates and takes seriously the lived experience of sexual identity, the body, and gender in plurisexuals’ navigation of social spheres and systems.

In brief, this thesis takes the body and gender seriously as a point through which identity is formed and navigated, internally, externally, and socially. This commitment in itself necessitates a trans and non binary-positive approach, centring a diverse range of experiences and acknowledging the complex messiness of gender. Bodies and genders can be complimentarily understood phenomenologically, through corporeal realism, through the ‘fleshy sociality’, performativity, and visibility. After the battles have been fought across and through the body, sexual identity can be

understood as an imperfect way of describing desire that has extraordinary political salience in enabling plurisexual visibility, community, and representation. These sexual identities, although inherently limiting, are politically necessary as plurisexual invisibility continues to be an issue that directly impacts on the social experience of plurisexuals. Further, it is integral to understand that plurisexuality is just one identity of many; an intersectional approach is critical in exploring how varying discriminations and oppressions on the basis of other identities may impact on a person. To illuminate the complex experiences of identity, I argue that it is important to focus on a lived experience of an individual to emphasise the contingency and relative importance of identities in day-to-day life.

Given the state of current theoretical literature, and the scant empirical data that exists in currently plurisexual scholarship, this conceptual framework is most fitting to elaborate a sociological study of plurisexual identities. I will explain how this conceptual and theoretical framework was operationalised in this PhD in the coming methodology chapter.

Chapter 5: Using a Queer Feminist Methodology: Centering Participant Experiences

5.0 Operationalising a Theoretical Framework

At this juncture, a brief recap is necessary to emphasise the way in which the developing argument was operationalised in the methodology of this project. So far, the chapters have demonstrated how plurisexuality is in need of sociological intervention to better understand the experiences of those who are plurisexual. This is reflected in the limited research that has been conducted into plurisexuality which demonstrates the complex issues people experience in their day-to-day lives relating to stigma, violence, and representation in particular. A review of the academic literature covering both broader sexuality scholarship and more specific plurisexual scholarship has highlighted how plurisexuality has often been omitted from the field of study, or studied without attention paid to gender, intersectionality, or the body. As I highlighted, there is a need to focus on these three elements in a theoretical approach to plurisexuality, given that plurisexuals' lived experiences are centred around their identities and the way in which people respond to their identities with stigma-laden responses.

In conducting this study, it was critical to develop a methodology and focus that would enable an academic and theoretical contribution to sexualities scholarship to better include plurisexuality and more nuanced perspectives on how we can best study sexuality within the scholarship. Additionally, my own identities as a bisexual/queer person who recently identifies as non binary, and someone who considers themselves to be an academic-activist meant that it was also important to me that this work have an emancipatory goal that would benefit both the participants taking part in the research as well as benefiting larger conversations around plurisexuality. Consequently, methodologically, this research placed the participants at the centre of investigation to provide a platform to draw out issues pertinent to transforming a social and academic landscape for purposes of better inclusion, as well as accommodating my focus on lived experience. To do this, this project involved two phases of research; the first phase involved one-on-one semi-structured interviews to consider how participants understood the range of sexual and gender identities relevant to them, and how these interacted with the variety of communities that they were a part of. The second phase of research involved a photo diary and a follow up interview to consider how participants framed and performed their sexual and gender identity through gesture and dress.

To consider the way in which this PhD project has operationalised these theoretical, empirical, and methodological concerns, I will draw out the methodological approach in further detail in this chapter. I will begin by elaborating on the queer feminist principles at the heart of this research, before explaining the study design in greater depth. I then discuss data collection and data analysis, before discussing the ethical concerns associated with running this project. I conclude with some reflexive

considerations, which are critical to understanding my approach to this project given my personal investment and passion about plurisexual identities, particularly in relation to gender identity.

5.1 Queer and Feminist Research: Power, Mutuality, and Trust.

This PhD was born out of a personal and passionate interest regarding plurisexuality, given my own bisexual/queer identity and the way in which I used scholarship to validate my identity to myself and to others. In engaging with this area, it became important to balance the personal desire to create interesting and emancipatory research with best research practices that ensured strong data. Knowing that I was largely working as an insider researcher, I chose to adopt both queer and feminist methods of research, based particularly on the methodological suggestions put forward by Oakley, Browne, and Nash (Oakley, 1981; Browne and Nash, 2010). These methodological approaches often emphasise mutual disclosure and a breakdown of power hierarchies between the researcher and the researched, as many other researchers in the field have discussed at length in their attempts to create ethical research practices (Oakley, 1981; England, 1994; Finlay, 2002; Riley, Schouten and Cahill, 2003; Muhammed et al., 2015). Many scholars – often feminist and queer scholars - have discussed the role of power in a qualitative research environment (Adams, 1999; Riley, Schouten and Cahill, 2003; Ganga and Scott, 2006; Smith, 2006; Eide and Kahn, 2008; Gailey and Prohaska, 2011; Huckaby, 2011; Wilkinson and Kitzinger, 2012; Muhammed et al., 2015), emphasising the way in which researchers most often hold the upper-hand in the research dynamic given the fact that researchers have the final say in how research is written, and what stories get to be told. In attempting to address these power differences, researchers have adopted various strategies such as creating co-produced research where participants are able to shape the data, adopting policies of mutual disclosure in the process of data collection, maintaining relationships with participants beyond the point of interview, and ensuring that – once completed – research information is disseminated back into the community to create an impact (Oakley, 2007; Swartz, 2011; Kara, 2017). These strategies appealed to me as I felt uncomfortable with the premise of simply taking information and using it for my own purposes.

In attempting to use a queer methodology, there are inevitable contradictions that emerge in bridging a queer theoretical and methodological framework with the constraints of traditional disciplinary scholarship. In essence:

> [Using queer methods] is not a simple task in an academy that increasingly embraces ‘queer’ contingencies while simultaneously requiring specific rules of rigour, clarity, and truthfulness (Browne and Nash, 2010; p.8).

Given that queer – as used by most queer theorists – is deconstructive in nature, with the aim of eroding categorisations, institutions, and power systems, theorists have spoken at length about the seemingly irreconcilable gaps between having a queer theoretical basis and adopting queer methodologies, with Green in particular suggesting that conceptual compromises have to be made in attempting to unify sociology and queer theory (Green, 2007). However, although adapted for the purposes of sociological study, it remains the case that even if adopting an amended queer theoretical and methodological approach that:

> refusing to specify, delimit, and define and be queer and […] queer dogmas can be contested by offering other ways of exploring (mainly gender and sexual difference) (Browne and Nash, 2010; p.9).

What this means in practice is that in this work there is sometimes a slippage between a deconstructive queer intent and a necessarily categorical assertion based on the needs of the academy and the need to recognise the power of labels for individuals in society. By holding onto a queer suspicion/interrogation of identity categories, one can still "challenge the supposed coherence, reliability, and generalisability regarded as a central concern to some social scientists" (Browne and Nash, 2010, p.12). Beyond Browne and Nash's characterisation of adapted queer methods, sociologists such as Roseneil and Hines have also asserted a queer sociological approach that centres the lived experience of individuals in analysis (Roseneil, 2000; Hines, 2006a, 2006b, 2010a). Roseneil and Hines emphasise a queer theoretical approach that centres lived experience, therefore necessarily accommodating individuals relationships to their particular identity categories and day-to-day lives, moving a queer theoretical analysis away from abstract concepts (Roseneil, 2000; Hines, 2006a, 2006b, 2010a). Furthermore, Roseneil and Hines support a sociological approach using an adapted queer theoretical framework in a similar way to this PhD thesis' approach (Roseneil, 2000; Hines, 2006a, 2006b, 2010a). As Green succinctly writes, in relation to sociology then:

> The queer theoretical contribution to social theory […] lies not in uncovering subjects and selves but […] pivoting the analysis to a broader field of normalization that invokes the terms of the social order so that it might ultimately reduce them to obsolescence (Green, 2007, p.43).

Merging a queer and a sociological approach further necessitates the use of qualitative methods. This is due to the need to centre participant experiences and approach these experiences as

phenomenological and individual due to intersecting identities, which in turn highlights the cisheteronormative and monosexist social structure that plurisexuals occupy. A qualitative queer sociological approach rejects positivism to allow for this phenomenological, experiential, individual-led approach. Through finding the unity across individual stories and experiences, it is possible to develop a broader picture of the social forces that restrict and enable certain identities to exist or fail. Further, enabling participants to express their opinions at length and in their own words allows for the contradictions and conflicts in the usage of language, assertions, and categories to emerge in a way coherent with queer theoretical intention. With these points in mind, I used an adapted queer approach to emphasise the role of identity categorisations, the body, gender, and intersectionality throughout the research to create research that would be more pragmatic and emancipatory in nature, given the concerns around the erasure and unequal outcomes for plurisexuals highlighted in previous chapters.

The question remains, in what ways did I use queer feminist principles in these methods? There were various strategies I took to queer qualitative research whilst simultaneously adhering to the expectations relevant to completing a sociological PhD, and forefronting identities, the body, gender, and intersectionality. These points will be elaborated on throughout the chapter, but in brief;

- This work highlights an understudied sexual identity, one that - although categorically defined – is often absent in the literature due to monosexism and the resultant categorical assertion that an individual can only be romantically or sexually attracted to one gender. In this way, a gay/heterosexual binary is challenged.
- The sampling call (which will be described in greater length later) was deliberately open in language and avoided using identity signifiers where possible to encourage those who may not strongly identify with a gender or sexuality label to take part.
- In the course of the interviews, I encouraged people to self-define their gender and sexuality as opposed to imposing a label of my choice on them and have attempted to use expansive language (i.e. plurisexual) throughout this dissertation to include the multiplicity of identities.
- I adopted mutual disclosure to restrict the imbalance of power between the participants and myself. In writing this piece, I locate myself strongly in a reflexive and open position throughout the thesis.

For these reasons, and others that will be drawn out in the course of this chapter, I consider my approach to be a queer and feminist interpretation of qualitative methodologies. Having said that, there are always limitations to how queer one can make their work:

- I have to contain the findings of this study in an 80,000-word document, as opposed to a conversation, or music, or dance, or something that falls outside of language.
- I have had to adopt scholarly procedures and adhere to university policies in collecting, gathering, writing, and processing this data, reifying institutional norms surrounding data presentation and publication.
- I have ultimately delimited the scope of this work by the medium through which the participants voices are heard. This means that as representative as I may try to be in discussing participant stories, I am ultimately the constructor of this thesis.

Consequently, I understand myself to be a co-constructor of the data, as my interpretation and writing is not without bias or intent.

I will now outline the details of my methodology, looking towards the study design, the data collection process, and the data analysis process, before concluding with a final reflexivity section to emphasise my role in interpreting the data as well as the emotional impact this research continues to have on me. It is my intent throughout this chapter to reflect particularly on the ways in which I attempted to subvert power dynamics, to emphasise the way in which this research has impacted on my own self and identity, and to draw out the necessity of adopting a queer feminist approach in studying sexualities.

5.2 Study Design

Having spent a large amount of time immersed in the extant work around sexuality – most specifically plurisexuality – and working from my own 'hunches' and interests as a queer individual (as other LGBTQ+ people have done, see: Heckert, 2010), I developed the following research question to begin the project:

- How do plurisexuals interpret, interact with, and experience identity, the body, and gender in their lives?

The following sub-questions were formed to elucidate the overarching research question;

- How do plurisexuals interpret and experience their own sexual and gender identities?
- How do plurisexuals' experiences of their own and others' bodies interact with their identities?

These questions were formed based on current gaps in research and the suggestion that there were aspects of these questions that warranted investigating to better understand plurisexual identities. Importantly, although adopting a queer deconstructive approach to sexuality and gender broadly, I

agreed with other scholars that plurisexuality must be engaged with as a sexual identity notwithstanding my decision to adopt a queer approach, and that identity should not be obscured by the deconstructive nature of queer theory, as other authors have argued in the case of LGBTQ+ identities (Halperin, 2003, 2009). By that, I mean that queer theory often attempts to unpick identities to the point of interpreting sexual currents, impulses, and transformations as opposed to incorporating interpretations of specific sexual identities like bisexuality or pansexuality that can – by their inclusion – subvert monosexist interpretations of sexuality and widen categories of identification (Burrill, 2001). I felt it important to maintain discrete categories of sexual identity within a study of sexuality due to the current invisibility and social derision of plurisexual identities, the impacts of which are seen in the significant health and social problems that plurisexuals are more susceptible to than other sexual identities (Jorm *et al.*, 2002; Barker and Langdridge, 2008; Steele *et al.*, 2009). As a result, I adopted an approach that focused on how people located themselves in relation to others – that is, how they identified their sexualities. Although numerous studies highlight that there are many more people who act sexually on multigendered attractions as opposed to identifying as plurisexual (Diamond, 2003a, 2003b; Thompson and Morgan, 2008; Reback and Larkins, 2010), I was interested in interpreting the experiences of those who located themselves socially as plurisexual, and how they subsequently interpreted their experiences and interactions in light of their sexual identities. Further, as I have discussed at length, I believe the body and gender to be integral sites of experience for plurisexuals and opted to centre these in the conversations I would have with other plurisexual people.

This approach led me to the development of semi-structured interviews as the first phase of research. Semi-structured interviews allow participants to deliver an in-depth narrative of their experience whilst still focusing on certain aspects relevant to the researcher's study interests. They can also provide a mode of deconstructing power relations, and give voice to "personal, experiential, and emotional aspects of existence" (Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002, p.155). This format allowed for a conversation between myself and participants around a series of particular topics (i.e. sexual identity, gender identity, relationships, and change over time), whilst also allowing participants to redirect the conversation and ask me questions in return. To operationalise the concepts within the theoretical framework, the interview schedule focused on the various aspects of how participants understood their sexual and gender identities, and how they felt their identities affected their social and romantic lives.

The sample description for taking part in the study was broad, as I wished to incorporate a participant base that could speak to the intersectional and interlocking experiences of holding multiple differing identities. There is a general absence of plurisexual specific studies within sexuality

studies (Monro, Hines and Osborne, 2017). This study attempted to remedy some gaps in contemporary plurisexual research, which often primarily focuses on white, middle-class, cis women. As a result, I felt passionately about incorporating the experiences of cis men, trans people, people of colour, and non binary people given the dearth of information around their experiences of plurisexuality. This is critical, particularly in the light of Hines' corpus of work that demonstrates that trans and non binary people have specific negotiated experiences of gender based on spatiality and cultural context (Hines, 2006b, 2006a, 2010b, 2010a). Consequently, upon advertising for a sample, I posted a request for people who were over 18 and sexually or romantically attracted to more than one gender, specifying that people may identify across a broad range of categories, including bisexual, pansexual, homoflexible, heteroflexible, queer, omnisexual, biromantic asexual, or otherwise. This broad language was used as previous research has demonstrated that plurisexuals often have varying identity descriptors (Halperin, 2009; Callis, 2013; Flanders, 2017), and so, in attempting to be inclusive of the variety of identities that fall under the plurisexual umbrella, I chose this language. Furthermore, using identity descriptors is validating and affirming for LGBTQ+ individuals:

> [I]ndividuals are likely to view their sexual orientation as integral to their personal identity […] further research of various sexual orientations may be useful to provide validity to some of the more commonly identified sexualities within the category of "other," such as asexual, pansexual, and romantic spectrum attractions. (Walton, Lykins and Bhullar, 2016, p.1596).

Through opening up the sample call linguistically, I tried to empower individuals who may have not felt 'queer enough' to participate in the research, as many plurisexuals feel fraudulent or uncertain regarding their identities (Knous, 2006).

Recruitment adverts were posted on Twitter and in various Facebook groups. I also reached out to personal networks. The advert was as follows:

Figure 1: Original Call for Participants

This generated interest, and potential participants were sent a consent form and an information sheet to see whether they wished to take part. Snowball sampling of participants (Browne, 2005) resulted in recruiting three participants. Participants were based across England and Scotland. During the latter stages of recruitment, I noted that the sample was rather homogenous in terms of gender (cis women), ethnicity (white), and education (tertiary education). Consequently, I readvertised for participants, specifically calling for BAME people and those who had not attended university, as seen in the range of following adverts:

Figure 2: Amended Call for Participants

Figure 3: Final Call for Participants

This resulted in an uptake from a number of people to contribute to a less uniform range of identities represented in this study, with ten participants responding to these specific calls. 30 participants were recruited until data saturation was reached, and participants began to repeat similar themes and experiences to one another, following the guidance of Guest et al. in conducting qualitative research (Guest, Bunce and Johnson, 2006). Upon meeting participants, I first went over the information sheet (see Appendix 1) and consent form (see Appendix 2) and asked if they had any questions before they signed their consent to participate. I then completed a demographics form (see Appendix 3) to get a characterisation of the sample. The final characterisation of the Phase I sample is as follows, which has been filled in using the specific language participants used in describing themselves across all columns:

Participant	Gender ID	Sexual ID	Relationship status	Age	Nationality	Ethnicity	Class Background	Highest Qualification
Bern	Non binary	Pansexual	In relationships (poly)	36	Mexican	White (Hispanic)	Middle Class	Postgraduate Degree
Jules	Non binary	Pansexual	In relationships (poly)	32	French	White	Lower Middle	Undergraduate Degree
Stan	Man	Bisexual	In a relationship	26	British	White	Working Class	Undergraduate Degree
Max	Female/ Genderqueer	Bisexual	In a relationship	20	British	White (British)	Middle Class	High School
Alice	Woman	Queer/ Bisexual	Single	32	British	White (British)	Middle Class	Postgraduate Degree
Jade-Louisa	Woman	Bisexual	Single	24	British	White (British)	Middle Class	Undergraduate Degree
Hyde	Genderqueerd emiboy	Bi Ace	Solo Poly	26	British	White (Jewish and Romany)	Working Class	Undergraduate Degree
Jake	Man	Bisexual	Single	21	Polish	White (Other)	Working Class	High school
Gina	Woman	Bisexual	In a relationship	24	British	White	Middle Class	High School
Gillian	Woman	Bisexual	Single	29	Australian	White (Other)	Middle Class	Postgraduate Degree
Elizabeth	Woman	Undefinable	Single	45	Austrian	White	Middle Class	Postgraduate Degree

Sarah	Woman	Bi/Pan	Marriage	30	British	White (British)	Middle Class	Postgraduate Degree
Jessamy	Woman	Bisexual	Poly Marriage (separated)	34	US/UK	White (Hebrew)	Working Class	High School
Carys	Woman	Bisexual	In a relationship	34	British	White (British)	Middle Class	Postgraduate Degree
Simone	Woman	Bisexual	Single	24	British	White (British)	Working/Middle Class	Postgraduate Degree
Amy	Woman	Lesbian	In a relationship	29	British	White (English)	Working Class	Undergraduate Degree
Cristina	Cis gender Woman	Bisexual	Married	33	Salvadorean	Mixed	Middle Class	Postgraduate Degree
Jessie	Female/ Genderqueer	Bisexual	In relationships (poly)	44	Welsh	White (Other)	Lower Middle	Undergraduate Degree
Mike	Man[6]	Bi+	Married	36	British	White (British)	Middle Class	Undergraduate Degree
Jana	Woman	Biromantic Demisexual	Single	26	Bulgarian	White (Eastern European)	Working/Middle class	Postgraduate Degree
Jacub	Man	Bisexual	Single	22	British	White	Unspecified	High School
Kaden	Non binary	Bisexual	In a relationship	23	British	White	Working Class	Undergraduate Degree
Lee	Man	Bisexual	Single	27	British	White	Lower Middle	Postgraduate Degree

Dave	Man	Bisexual	Single	57	British	White	Unspecified	Post High School Qualifications
Rishabh	Man	Bisexual	Single	22	Indian	Asian (Indian)	Middle Class	Undergraduate Degree
Daniel	Cis male	Bisexual	Single	26	English	White (British)	Working Class	Post High School Qualifications
Kal	Female	Pansexual	In a relationship	32	Burmese/ UK	Burmese	Middle Class	Undergraduate Degree
Jacq	Non binary	Bisexual	Single	49	Black British	Black British	Working Class	Undergraduate Degree
Abha	Cis female	Sexual	Single	30	British	Indian/Jewish	Middle Class	Undergraduate Degree
Isabelle	Female	Bisexual	Single	24	British	Mixed (Black, Caribbean, British)	Working Class	High School

Table 1: Sample Demographics

[6] Since the interview, Mike has come out as non binary. He still uses he/him pronouns and has given me his blessing to include this footnote without changing the rest of the main text to reflect this development.

Final participant demographics demonstrate a range of experiences and identities that people associate with. In terms of relationship experiences, many of the participants had – at one stage or another – been polyamorously partnered or behaved polyamorously. The majority of participants had had what they described as a serious long-term relationship with another person at some point in their lives, or as an ongoing relationship at the point of interview. Many participants were single and actively dating or open to the possibility of dating. Two participants had no dating or sexual experience.

Interviews were conducted in person to build rapport, apart from two interviewees who preferred to be interviewed via Skype video calls (see interview schedule in Appendix 4). Interviews were recorded using a digital recorder, and the files were uploaded onto the University of Bristol server and deleted from the recorder as soon as possible. To queer the power dynamics implicit in these processes, I emphasised that participants were welcome to ask any questions of me regarding my own experiences of being a plurisexual person, and many participants chose to ask me intimate details of my life. Additionally, prior to interviewing the participants I consulted an expert in domestic violence and bisexuality. Sally-Anne Beverley is a PhD Researcher at the University of Leeds, researching bisexual women's experiences of domestic violence. Beverley is also involved in the Bi Survivors Network, a group established to support bisexual people following domestic and/or sexual violence. Beverley kindly offered her expertise via a telephone call, providing helpful advice on how to best respond to personal discussions regarding domestic violence and sexual assault in an interview context, specifically through regularly checking in and offering to turn off the voice recorder to have a personal conversation instead (Beverley, 2018, personal communication).

Most participants chose their pseudonyms. Some participants did not wish to use pseudonyms and are here identified by their real first names. Other participants left me to choose a pseudonym on their behalf. After participating in Phase I, participants were given a resource sheet detailing various plurisexual resources, including plurisexual culture (podcasts, films, TV), and potentially relevant helplines (gender organisations, domestic violence organisations, mental health helplines). This resource sheet (see Appendix 5) was given as I was concerned that we may touch on triggering topics, given the poor mental and physical health status of many plurisexuals globally (Jorm *et al.*, 2002; Barker and Langdridge, 2008; Steele *et al.*, 2009). Following the interviews, I sent a follow up e-mail after a few days. This e-mail was to establish whether participants had anything additional they wished to contribute to the conversation, and whether they felt well following the interviews, which were often intimate and emotionally charged.

The second phase of research involved fewer participants and was a two-week photo diary with a follow up interview where participants were asked to think in more detail about their gender identities and sexual expression. I intended to ask 8-10 participants to take part in the second phase of research and wished to have a balanced representation of different genders amongst the Phase II participants. I aimed to engage 3 cis men, 3 cis women, and 3 trans, non binary, or gender diverse participants as I was particularly interested in the way in which participants expressed their gender and wanted a diverse range of genders represented. I asked participants after participating in Phase I if they would be interested in participating in Phase II (see Appendix 6 and 7 for participant information sheet and consent form). As participation saturation was reached, I did not ask every participant to take part in Phase II research. Some participants who were asked chose not to take part in Phase II, though I did not press individuals to explain why they did not want to take part. The participants of Phase II were relatively diverse, however, all identified as White apart from one participant who identified as Mixed. Bern, Stan, Hyde, Jake, Simone, Amy, Cristina, Mike, and Jana participated. The participants' identities break down into; 3 trans or non binary participants, 2 cis men, and 4 cis women / 5 British participants, 1 Central American, 1 South American, 2 European participants / Participant ethnicities were self-described as: 1 White Hispanic, 1 White Jewish Romany, 1 White Other, 1 White British, 1 White English, 1 White Eastern European, 1 Mixed, and 2 White / 4 Postgraduate Education, 4 Undergraduate Education, 1 High School Education.

In agreeing to take part in Phase II, participants were asked to take photos of their outfits or other things that reminded them of their gender and sexuality, and when interviewed, I asked participants why they had chosen what they were wearing, and whether they had adapted their visual expression dependent on the types of spaces they were attending (see interview schedule in Appendix 8). This phase allowed participants to be more creative and expressive in telling me about themselves, with many finding the freedom to show - as opposed to tell - a far more useful way of elaborating on their experiences. In many ways, the direction of this phase was far more in the participants' control as they were able to stage, edit, and delete pictures according to what they wished to show me. Pictures were sent via e-mail, or via WhatsApp - an encrypted messaging application. Interviews were recorded using a digital recorder, and the files were uploaded onto the University of Bristol server and deleted from the recorder as soon as possible. I have not included copies of the pictures in this dissertation as I want to maintain the highest levels of confidentiality possible for the participants. The interviews built on conversations that we touched on in the first phase of research around how sexual and gender identity coalesced and influenced fashion, gesture, and presentation for plurisexual people. The data in the interviews was essentially an extension and more in-depth discussion of themes from Phase I. The data from these interviews is presented throughout this thesis alongside

the data from Phase I, although the pictures, used as a conversational prompt rather than for visual analysis, have not been included.

Throughout the course of the research, I kept field notes to reflect on salient themes that emerged, as well as tracking my own thoughts about sexual and gender identity after talking to participants. These field notes became integral to reflecting on my own location in the research, and the interpretations that I was bringing to analysis that I had to query before engaging with participant data. Writing my thoughts down also turned into a mode of diarisation whereby I was able to discuss my emotive responses to the interviews and how this impacted on myself as a bisexual/queer non binary person. The overall flow of the research was as follows:

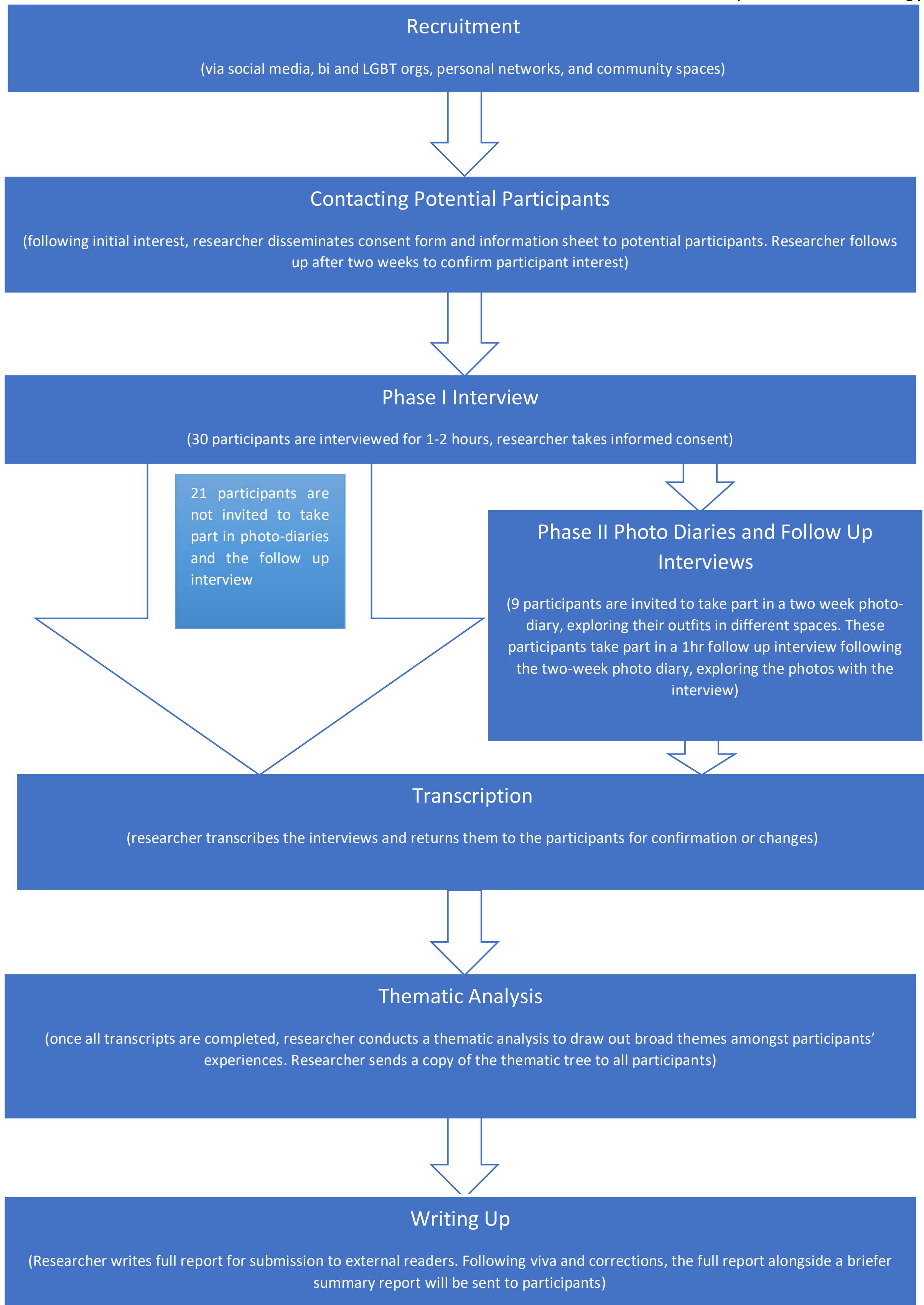

Table 2: Overview of Research Process

5.3 Data Analysis

Once data from both phases was collected, I transcribed the audio material. Transcripts were sent to participants to check, with the explicit confirmation that they were entitled to edit, change, amend, or withdraw any and all parts of their transcripts. Many participants chose to edit their documents, removing stories or reference points they felt may be too recognisable, or clarifying their language to add specificity to their points. No participants chose to withdraw their contributions. If participants did not make any comments within two weeks of receiving the transcript, I assumed that they were happy with how their data was recorded and entered the transcripts into analysis. In these ways, I established that participants had ownership over their own stories and could redirect the research past the point of interview.

Confirmed transcripts were uploaded into NVivo 11 for analysis. Photographs from Phase II were not analysed, as I relied on the participant's interpretation and explanation of their photo diary in the course of the follow up interviews as opposed to interpreting their outfits myself. I used a thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) to interpret the interview data as I was interested in grouping the similarities and differences amongst plurisexuals in terms of how they interpreted their identities, their sexualities, and their behaviours. Thematic analysis is a useful form of analysis for generating themes in data sets (Braun and Clarke, 2006). In the context of this study, a thematic analysis highlighted the experiences common across plurisexual sexualities and amongst gender expressions. I originally intended to divide the thematic analysis across three sets, to explore the themes within gender groupings of cis men, cis women, and gender-diverse people. However, upon completing the interviews and realising the complex way in which people framed their genders, which was often more fluid than the three categories might suggest, I chose to do a single thematic analysis across all genders. To ensure a rigorous thematic analysis, I followed the steps suggested by Braun and Clarke:

	Phase	Description of the Process
1	Familiarising yourself with your data:	Transcribing data (if necessary), reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas.
2	Generating initial codes:	Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.
3	Searching for themes:	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.
4	Reviewing themes:	Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2), generating a thematic 'map' of the analysis.
5	Defining and naming themes:	Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme.
6	Producing the report:	The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis.

(From Braun & Clarke 2006, p.87)

Table 3: Description of Thematic Analysis

In analysing the data from this project, I read transcripts to develop an overall impression of early topics or themes that repeated across all or most interview participants. Relevant transcript segments from all participants was then coded systematically into these initial topics or themes. Following this, topics were grouped together into broader overarching themes. I reviewed the groups of topics in each overarching theme to refine and adjust to create a stronger narrative that was representative of participant experiences. After the end of this period of coding, I left the data alone for a period of time before returning to it to check the clarity of the themes once more, making minor adjustments largely in theme titles. Having analysed the data accordingly, I developed three overarching themes with nested subthemes. These are demonstrated in the table below, with a brief accompanying description of the purpose of each theme:

Overarching theme	Subtheme	Description
Monosexism and Plurisexual Identities	Monosexist Internal Narratives	Discusses the difficulty of identifying by a plurisexual label due to social monosexism
	Monosexism and Homophobia in Disclosure and Community	Highlights how monosexism and homophobia coalesce when participants disclose their identities, both in heterosexual and gay/lesbian spaces
	Navigating Monosexism and Homophobia	Meditates on the skills and mindsets plurisexuals used to navigate owning their identities in a monosexist and homophobic environment
Bodies, Futures, and Expectations in Plurisexual Relationships	Embodied Sexualities	Highlights the way that plurisexual people experience sexual relationships with different genders
	Expectations in Gendered Relationships	Explores how plurisexuals experience romantic relationships with different genders
Gender Ambivalence and Plurisexuals	Cis People and Gender Performance	Discusses how cis people experienced masculinity and femininity
	Trans and Non Binary People and Gender Performance	Talks about trans and non binary people's experiences of performing gender in different spaces
	Plurisexuality and Gender Identity	Underscores the explicit connections participants drew between their plurisexuality and sexual identities

Table 4: Description of themes and findings

5.4 Ethical Concerns

This study intended to challenge power relations and empower participants by using a queer and feminist approach. Simultaneously, conducting this study involved considering many potentially

distressing situations for prospective participants. From the outset, it was important to consider how discussing sensitive topics such as sexual identity, gender identity, and discrimination may impact the participants. Given that sex and romance are relatively private topics for most people, these disclosures had the potential to upset participants after the interview if they felt they had disclosed too many details. I was also aware that many participants may not have had the opportunity to disclose their identities to others, or talk about their identities at length with others given the way in which plurisexualities are discriminated against, as research suggests that some plurisexuals choose to 'pass' as gay or heterosexual (Lingel, 2009). Another guiding ethical concern was the fact that there is little literature in existence specifically on plurisexual identities, and plurisexual activist groups often receive little funding comparative to larger LGBTQ+ organisations (Andre, 2012; Monro, Hines and Osborne, 2017). Consequently, I not only wished to provide a positive experience emphasising confidentiality and support for participants, but I also wanted this research to benefit the population at large through carefully representing the voices of those who spoke to me, and later through disseminating this research both in traditional academic publications, and through activist channels.

Firstly, in tackling the task of providing a positive experience for participants, I sought to redress the power imbalance. I was aware of the typical dynamics of an interview, which effectively reinforce a power dynamic between the interviewee (passive, waiting to give information), and the interviewer (dominant, authority on the subject) (Pittaway, Bartolomei and Hugman, 2010). In disrupting this, Oakley's work informed my decision to offer any information about my own identity where relevant, solicited, and appropriate (Oakley, 1981). In practice, this meant that participants interviewed me on topics like whether I had ever questioned my own gender identity, or what had happened when I came out. Participants asked me how I felt about dating different genders and whether I performed my sexuality differently with different participants. Although these disclosures on my part intensified trust and confidentiality, they also resulted in increased levels of disclosure from participants. This escalating disclosure was problematic at points, as the interviews veered into territories that were not in keeping with the research direction of this project, and I felt that participants were sometimes telling me stories that were extremely personal that I would be responsible for witnessing. Although catharsis can be typical in interviews (Hiller and Diluzio, 2004), the weight of responsibility of what to do with a story that I had been entrusted with became too much for me as a novice researcher. I had to do a large amount of emotion work to manage my emotional state as a researcher, as a confidante, and as someone who was open to listening to the participants, all of which are issues that have been raised particularly in the field of health research (Hubbard, Backett-Milburn and Kemmer, 2001; Dickson-Swift et al., 2006, 2007). Previous research has discussed how fieldwork can impact on the emotions of the researcher in negative ways, through

trauma for example (Johnson and Clarke, 2003; Connolly and Reilly, 2007; Bergman Blix and Wettergren, 2015). I heard stories of sexual assault and of childhood sexual abuse, neither of which pertained directly to the research questions that I was seeking to answer, although both of which were extremely important for the participants to speak about. I felt there were points where these disclosures were cathartic for participants, however, they were not necessarily contributing to an empowering and positive research experience, possibly instead bringing trauma to the forefront of this research experience. As a result, I adapted my techniques to answer any interviewee questions at the end of the interview. This in turn limited the queerness of my approach, as I added a limitation to when the participants could interview me, thus reinforcing a power dynamic where I had the final say on the order of proceedings.

I was aware that I had to ensure that participants' mental wellbeing was not negatively affected by the research. I felt it likely that participants would discuss times in which they experienced significant psychological distress, possibly including disclosures of rape, domestic violence, and sexual assault. This assumption on my part was based on the high levels of sexual assault, rape, and domestic violence seen across plurisexual and trans identities (Jorm *et al.*, 2002; Colledge *et al.*, 2015; HRC and TPOCC, 2016). To address these concerns, I ensured that the participants were fully aware that they could withdraw consent at any point, and that their transcripts could be removed from analysis until publication. Furthermore, each participant was given a list of resources to look at following the interviews, including not only mental health resources, and gender resources, but also podcasts, TV shows, and books. I would like to note that I felt somewhat uncomfortable at the thought of providing resources and checking in with participants, as I sometimes felt I was paternalistic in the way that I doled out these resources, communicating something of a 'I know what you need and I'm the expert, so…' Additionally, I knew that – in many cases – those who have a proclivity to experience distress or who have managed trauma historically know full well how to negotiate and manage their emotions without my support. However, all that said, there may have been one person out of the thirty I interviewed that needed it, and I attempted to provide those items in case I met them. At the same time, the resource list I provided was a way of referring individuals to specific experts in areas that I am unfamiliar with, such as refuge centres or mental health helplines. This signified that I was not an expert in supporting people across certain areas, as well as providing an outlet for participants who may have wished to talk to someone other than myself about their experiences at interview. Through referring participants elsewhere if they had problems, I was aware that a boundary had been drawn, which was useful in terms of limiting the level of emotional intensity I may come across, but also meant that I would not know if the participants were extremely distressed following the interviews. Thus, supporting participant wellbeing meant in practice establishing boundaries in what I could

provide for them. Additionally, often participants would read the resource list at the point of the interview and immediately refer me to another range of resources I could add for future participants, highlighting the fact that we were both experts in engaging with our own cultures of sexuality.

I felt non binary and trans participants may find it difficult to discuss their historical gender expression and gender identity in the context of their sexuality given the current state of politics, social stigma, and virulent culture of transphobia (Weiss, 2003; Hines, 2006b, 2006a, 2010b, 2017; Gilbert, 2009; Lombardi, 2009; Worthen, 2016; Richards *et al.*, 2016; Bergman and Barker, 2017; Richards, Bouman and Barker, 2017). I anticipated that for some participants, the most salient identity for them may be that of their gender-expression, whereas for cis plurisexuals, it would be their sexuality. Consequently, I did not ask trans and non binary participants their gender histories. I did not ask anything about childhood gender experiences, deadnames, medical questions, physical attributes, or any other inappropriate questions unless the participants wanted to discuss these topics. In the interview process, I paid attention to the wellbeing of the participant throughout the interview, ensuring that they knew they could withdraw consent at any time.

In attempting to empower the participant population, I sent participants the transcripts to edit as they chose. I told all participants they were welcome to remain in contact with me and send anything further that they wished to contribute. Some participants consequently continue to send me blogs, articles, TV recommendations, and other plurisexual content. I have also told participants I will send them anything I write. This includes this dissertation, a summary document, any publications that stem directly from the research in this PhD, and other ways in which I disseminate information on the basis of their interviews. To date, this has included a podcast from Triple Bi Pass, an Australian radio show (Mountford, Lekkas and Nelson, 2019). I am in the process of writing journal articles based on this work (Nelson, 2020, no date) and intend to move past academia to feedback information to the community at large through developing infographics for social media, writing for Bi Community news,[7] and offering a workshop at BiCon.[8]

5.5 Reflexivity and Writing

Given the personal nature of this research, and in keeping with this intentional approach to the way in which I navigated my relationships with participants, I was also careful to adopt a reflexive attitude to my own sense of identity and its impact on the research I was conducting. Without a doubt,

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[7] Bi Community News is a bisexual community newsletter, released bi monthly and available here: https://www.bicommunitynews.co.uk/

[8] BiCon is a bisexual conference/convention that happens annually, details available here: https://bicon.org.uk/

much of this research comes from questions I have had about my own identity at points in my life. Consequently, in keeping with feminist and queer positions I am aware that our identities as researchers greatly shape the data we collect and analyse (Finlay, 2002; Riley, Schouten and Cahill, 2003; Watt, 2007; Karnieli-Miller, Strier and Pessach, 2009; Muhammed et al., 2015). Reflexivity is a critical component of this PhD, and one which is apparent throughout the narrative of this dissertation. I considered at length my position as an insider researcher, one who understood the position of a minoritised sexual group in a monosexist and homophobic society. As others have commented, insider researchers are often able to build high levels of rapport with participants, and follow 'hunches' based on their own experiences (Watts, 2006; Muhammed et al., 2015). In contrast, outsider researchers are often depicted as benefiting from a more expansive explanation of experiences, although they may be interpreted as exploitative or untrustworthy researchers (Kanuha, 2000; Bridges, 2001). However, as other researchers have pointed out, one cannot solely be an insider researcher at all times (Bridges, 2001; Sherif, 2001; Ganga and Scott, 2006; Breen, 2007; Obasi, 2014). I found that my sample was so diverse that I could not relate to experiences of racism BAME people experienced, of hegemonic masculinity that cis men had to adhere to, of feeling worried that someone would not be attracted to one's whole self as a non binary or trans person. One participant said that when they came out as bisexual to their parents, they were afraid they would be murdered. These statements, so unfamiliar from my own experience, left me feeling wholly inadequate. Should I respond with shock? Should I maintain composure and neutrality? Should I empathise? I responded in all of these ways at various points in the interviews. I felt the depth of difference between myself and the participants, and to better negotiate my outsider status, I engaged more fully with scholarly literature outside of sexuality studies to understand different forms of discrimination (Examples of which included: Nagel, 2003; McLean, 2004; Collins, 2006; Hines, 2006a, 2010a; Murugami, 2009; Richards, Bouman and Barker, 2017). In this way, I attempted to overcome the gaps in my own knowledge and experience so that I need not rely on participants having to explain the minutiae of their everyday lives to me.

In addition to the necessity of adopting a reflexive position to mediate the differences between myself and the participants, it was also necessary to undertake a significant amount of emotion-work to maintain a positive outlook throughout fieldwork. Dickson-Swift et al. have spoken about emotion work as a way in which researchers manage their emotional responses in responding to participants (Dickson-Swift et al., 2006, 2007). This is due to the need to maintain an air of professionalism and openness to conversation, which then results in researchers feeling vulnerable, developing emotional relationships with participants, and potentially becoming desensitised to traumatic topics (Dickson-Swift et al., 2006, 2007). Johnson and Clarke have further demonstrated

that researching sensitive topics in particular can result in researcher anxiety and isolation (Johnson and Clarke, 2003). I had a number of highs and lows during the course of this project which definitely impacted the research, such as the euphoria of connection I felt in talking to participants who shared identities with me, leading me to feel the reciprocity of understanding between myself and the participants, which was comforting in a monosexist environment. However, the good also came with the bad, as participants also spoke about traumatic things that had happened to them which had the effect of retraumatising me as I remembered acts of violence or discrimination which had happened to me as a result of my gender or sexual identity. Although I was happy to be able to hear the participants in a way that gave them some comfort, it took an emotional toll on me, both in terms of hearing trauma, and in terms of attempting to understand what I should do with these stories. Was it enough to simply listen to them and be there as they spoke? Was I required to report these stories, to give a voice to those who needed to unpack trauma? In what way could I value and acknowledge the difficult things that the participants had spoken to me about? To initially deal with this, I adapted my interview style and asked participants to wait until the end of the interview to ask me any questions about myself which I would answer honestly and openly. This had the effect of reducing the escalating disclosures that had previously been happening. I also had to acknowledge that through positioning myself as an insider in this fieldwork process, I was in danger of over-empathising with the participants – a risk of which is attempting to support participants beyond the period of the interview (Hubbard, Backett-Milburn and Kemmer, 2001; Dickson-Swift et al., 2006). As a result, I had to emotionally distance myself from the participants somewhat, to ensure that I did not create or give space to an unhealthy dynamic through which I would attempt to support them in ways that they neither asked for, nor needed. In terms of the writing of this dissertation, I have chosen not to include the stories that did not answer the research questions directly. I thought about this for a long time, but ultimately believe that it will neither contribute anything to the overarching intention of this dissertation, and nor would I have the space to give each story the attention, outrage, and support that they deserve. However, it is important to note that these decisions – all made unilaterally by myself, occasionally following a supervisor consultation – are once again indicative of the power held in the hands of the researcher, whereby I ultimately dictate the story that is told, decide what information best suits which argument, and have the final say in representing those who gave their time and energy to supporting this project in the hopes it could make an impact on the representation of plurisexuals in society.

With these elements all coming together – and as I have written about elsewhere (Nelson, 2020) – it is no wonder that this research has had a significant impact on my own sense of identity. Having been exposed to participants who were the same and yet different to me, I was allowed a

moment of reflection on my own identities and sense of self. More specifically, I began to question my gender identity in the course of my research – and this remains unresolved – I currently identify as non binary as a direct result of hearing from the participants what non binary means to them. Yet, I remain uncertain as to whether this is an accurate depiction of my gender, or whether I will later identify as a cis woman once more. Furthermore, studying sexuality, love, relationships, and gender more broadly has come at a time in my life when I have been navigating dating and relationships myself. As a result, it is impossible for me to write this PhD, which is so close to my own heart, without emotion. The relationships I built with the participants, as well as the time I have had to reflect in isolation on the importance of the issues I discuss in this dissertation have shaped my own sense of identity and purpose in ways that will echo throughout my life. Most importantly, the respect I have for the participants having heard and shared their experiences has spilled over in many regards to continued connections, given that I disseminate any research outcomes with them, including journal articles, podcasts, impact activities, blog pieces, and more, and many participants in return send me articles, poems, event invitations, and other things that they think I would be interested in.

As a result of the way in which I have shaped the data through my own identity, experiences, and interpretations, as well as the way in which participants have shaped my understanding of the world, my own identity, and the subject I study, it became apparent that to leave my voice out of the narrative of this PhD would be inappropriate. Consequently, as is clear by this point, this dissertation actively incorporates my position as a researcher-subject in a way that is akin to autoethnography at points (Anderson, 2006 provides an overview of the autoethnographic method). Although somewhat exposing and uncomfortable at points, it feels unnatural to present this data in any other way. Considering this project emerged from many of my own experiences, it was necessary to engage in a variety of self-care methods. Although I firmly believe that self-care is symptomatic of the need for resilience as part of one's selfhood - which itself is indicative of the increasing individuation under capitalist neoliberalism – it was necessary to adopt a number of different methods to tend to my needs. I maintained open communication with friends, colleagues, supervisors, families, and partners throughout to let them know whether I was stressed, emotional, or in need of support. My colleagues in particular formed a wonderful peer support group around me, where over lunches in our office we would discuss the ongoing stresses in our projects and support one another. In the immediate aftermath of the field work, when I was located in Bristol for the majority of the time, I sought counselling through the University service to debrief the intensity of the conversations that I had had with participants. As I write this section of this dissertation, I still feel a lingering guilt that I was so heavily affected by the words of others and a concern that this dissertation is taking an overly exposing and narrative form that shifts the focus from the plurisexual participants who made this project

happen. Skeggs has argued elsewhere that it is important to move away from discussing oneself and establishing oneself as a reputable and reflexive source so that we may prioritise the work that is happening (Skeggs, 2002). However, I feel that I am not singly presenting my identities as 'bisexual' or 'non binary' and thus not engaging with the concurrent authority that can stem from my other identities as 'researcher' or 'white', but rather I am engaging with my experiences in ways that situate the self and engage with complex, simultaneous positions between myself and my research participants. In these ways, writing my experiences in doing this research helped. My supervisors received numerous chapters or emails that were often akin to diaries. I wrote a field diary throughout my field work, initially just to record relevant thematic thoughts, but increasingly a site through which I meditated upon my own emotions, identities, and feelings following an extensive interview. The use and importance of the field diary in my experience has been discussed elsewhere (Nelson, 2020).

Beyond offering my voice throughout this work, I wished to ensure that I centred the experiences of those I spoke to throughout this process. At the beginning of each theme, I have chosen to introduce vignettes of some of the participants to maintain the individuality and unique voice of the participants. Eight participants' reflections around a particular theme are presented in totality, giving voice to their experiences and reflections around specific elements discussed in this work. This was important to me, so that at least a few of the participants' experiences would not be fractured and lost amongst a thematic analysis but would be presented wholly as an appreciation of them as entire beings. I felt this necessary so that I could in some way move away from the image of researchers – particularly outsider researchers – as harvesting information for their own purposes (Bridges, 2001).

5.6 Retrospective Thoughts on a Queer and Feminist Methodology

This methodology was developed with a queer and feminist intent to provide a positive, confidential, and empowering experience for participants whilst also developing work which could benefit other plurisexuals. In the course of doing this research, I personally was affected through the field work far more than I had anticipated and am experiencing many questions about my own sense of identity. I have also developed a number of continued relationships with the participants that speak to the nature of queer and feminist research as providing space to develop friendships and experience things in collaboration with participants. I am in regular contact with a small number of participants who I now consider my friends. I met a friend-participant for a drink the other day. He told me that taking part in the interview had shown him that he was not alone, and that he was valid. Since the interview, almost a year ago now, he has come out to his parents, started working on a number of (successful) projects around his sexuality with national organisations, and become a role model to those around him. He credits the turning point with having had the venue to parse out his feelings in

interview. This, I feel, is what a queer and feminist methodology can provide, and what mutuality, power deconstruction, and reflexivity can offer to research subjects. I have no doubt he would have done this without being interviewed, but, as he said, it was a good catalyst.

With all this in mind, the remainder of this dissertation will present the results from this study whilst maintaining the voices and individuality of a number of the participants, and also highlighting my own experiences of the topics that the participants discussed in our time together.

Chapter 6: Monosexism and Plurisexual Identities

6.0 Plurisexuality and Identity

In the course of this study, participants spoke at length about the ways in which they understood their sexual identities. Participants spoke about their connection to various labels such as 'bisexual', 'asexual', 'pansexual', 'queer', 'poly', and 'kink'. This chapter explores three overarching themes (1) Monosexist Internal Narratives, (2) Monosexism and Homophobia in Disclosure and Community, and (3) Navigating Monosexism and Homophobia. In brief, participants had complicated relationships with the plurisexual labels they applied to their experiences of desire and sexuality, with participants feeling the labels were limiting yet simultaneously feeling emotionally connected to them. Due to monosexist external pressures, participants often felt uncertain in relation to their identities, and found it difficult to trust in their experiences and desires as being indicative of a plurisexual identity. Socially, participants did not feel consistently welcome in LGBTQ+ spaces - although it was important to meet people who understood their status as belonging to a minoritised sexual group. In navigating monosexism, participants discussed the way in which they often compromised their sense of identity through using simpler or more widely understood labels to describe their sexuality to others, as opposed to using niche terminology that was more representative of their sexuality. Many participants also navigated imposed feelings of shame, fear, and guilt regarding their sexual identities on the basis of not adhering to either heteronormative and homonormative expectations by adjusting their identities in certain situations or through educating others around them.

This chapter contributes to previous work regarding identity management in sexuality and plurisexuality scholarship. I have made a concentrated effort to draw out specifically homophobic and monosexist interactions to demonstrate how experiences of plurisexual people may contrast with lesbian and gay experiences of homophobia. Furthermore, this chapter explores the impact of adopting a plurisexual identity for cis women and men, trans women and men, and non binary people - this comparison across genders is a contribution of this thesis given how plurisexual research often focuses on cis women's experiences. This chapter's main contribution is a new theoretical dimension to understanding the way in which plurisexual people come to understand their sexualities, through suggesting that plurisexual people are *Sexual Renegades* who have necessarily developed a plurisexual ontology that deviates from the monosexist social order. This chapter concludes with a variety of ways to develop identity theory within sexuality scholarship more broadly, based on the research findings from this study.

6.1 Figuring It Out: Monosexist Internal Narratives

Jana's Story

Monosexism can have significant impacts on individuals' understandings of themselves, emerging often as 'internalised biphobia,' where an individual tells themselves they cannot be plurisexual because no such thing exists, or if it does it is disgusting (Ochs, 1996). In my own experience of coming to terms with my plurisexuality, I persistently felt a level of uncertainty regarding being able to claim a label and an experience – was I bisexual enough? If I didn't have a comparable level of sexual or romantic experience with all genders, could I still talk about my bisexuality? Was I actually a lesbian and just attempting to come to terms with it through using bisexuality as a steppingstone? Knous has noted this experience of sexual uncertainty in studying plurisexuals, where questioning one's identity formed a large part of one's experience as a plurisexual (Knous, 2006).

I was unsurprised when the participants spoke about similar experiences in formulating their identities, with many referencing a cycle of identities that they had gone through prior to settling on their current sexual identities. Most participants in this study no longer felt uncertain regarding their identities, having worked through the monosexist influences that suggested that they could not be plurisexual in the early years of coming to terms with their identities. In fact, the majority of participants felt comfortable with their identities, certainly comfortable enough to claim a plurisexual identity in a research context. This was not necessarily related to the research context given that my sample call was for people 'romantically or sexually attracted to more than one gender' and only included identity terms as potential examples of people the study may be open to.

A few of the participants' uncertainty was still present in the course of our interview, such as in the case of Jana. Jana is a white 26-year-old cis woman studying for a PhD who identifies as a biromantic demisexual. In the course of our interview, Jana spoke about her lack of romantic and sexual experience, having had one childhood same-gender experience, and more recently, she kissed one of her friends. Jana spoke openly about her lack of sexual and romantic experience, and as I asked her to tell me about her identity and how she interpreted her identity, she would disclose an identity label and then clarify it carefully. In asking her to define her sexual identities, she said:

> I think my sexual identity is a biromantic demisexual. I say 'I think' because I've never really been in a relationship, I've never had a chance to actually act out on any of this, but based on the history of people I've been attracted to.

Jana seemed to feel the need to test her sexual identity, which she saw as hypothetical until she had had more sexual or romantic encounters. Jana discussed her conservative upbringing and the lack of diverse sexual identities around her growing up, as well as her parental influence, which she explained as being dismissive of anything other than heterosexuality, and more specifically dismissive of the notion that sexuality could be fluid. Jana turned to online resources to see the other possibilities available. She used YouTube, Tumblr, various forums, and books to explore alternate ways of 'doing' sexuality. In many ways this helped as Jana could find stories and experiences that matched her feelings. For Jana, labels were important in making sense of the confusion she felt towards her sexuality. It seems however, that Jana will remain uncertain about her identity until she is able to experience a romantic or sexual encounter that can answer her questions.

Jana's story is indicative of how difficult it can be to feel justified in adopting a plurisexual identity label due to the consistent monosexist social messaging that plurisexuality is a phase, a stepping stone, or a period of experimentation (Klein, 1993). As Jana's story shows, monosexism interferes in people's sexual development by suggesting that it is impossible to identify as plurisexual, and consequently plurisexuals have to rely on truly trusting their own instincts, desires, and experiences in forming their identities. For some, such as Jana, who may not have had significant sexual or romantic experience, this can be an extremely difficult step to take as they cannot 'evidence' their identities and thus potentially believe themselves to be falling into monosexist narratives where plurisexuals are 'making it up for attention' or are 'indecisive'.

In essence, the dominant monosexist ontology that dictates that individuals should be attracted to only one gender creates an ontological chasm for plurisexuals. A plurisexual ontology, based on desire, identity and/or behavior, suggests that gender and sexuality need not correlate, and there need not be a unidirectional attraction to one gender. Plurisexuals strengthened their plurisexual ontology through the usage of labels, finding community, and trusting in their own experiences. This section explores these initial moments of strengthening a plurisexual ontology. These experiences were prevalent across the research sample, as I will unpack more thoroughly in the next section.

The Usefulness (or not) of Plurisexual Labels

In the course of this study, plurisexuals identified by many labels, including bisexual, bi+, queer, pansexual, demisexual, aromantic, asexual, undefinable, as well as polyamorous and/or kinky. For many plurisexuals, labels were seen both as a restrictive annoyance, and as an emancipatory possibility. This conflict, typically within the same conversation with the same person, swung from "one day [my identity] may change," to "I couldn't comprehend a world in which I wasn't bi and I

wasn't able to understand myself in that way" (Jade-Louisa, 24, Bisexual, Cis woman). This conceptual clash spoke to the way in which plurisexuals felt that labels had multiple purposes, not all of them positive. Many participants spoke about how labels invariably restricted the possible scope of sexual experience:

> Putting any kind of prefix is restrictive […] because who I meet, who I'm with, what I want to do, what I'm interested in changes all the time. And there are things that are more common to put as a prefix in front of sexual, like 'bi' or 'pan' or 'poly' but […] for example for a while I was quite involved in the kink scene, so kinksexual - what are the important things to put as your main label and what are things... I love sex? Is there a name for that I have to broadcast for everyone?
>
> *(Abha, 30, Sexual, Cis female)*

> I am increasingly coming to the conclusion that everybody's sexuality is individual […] I almost feel that it would better if we just got rid of the whole thing
>
> *(Mike, 36, Bi+, Male)*

> I'd prefer not to have a label at all […] I think there's a lot of baggage like […] negative connotations depending on who you're talking to
>
> *(Lee, 27, Bisexual, Male)*

Plurisexuals were very quick to question the use of labels, often linking them to a restriction of potential sexual experiences and practices due to the associated expectations of each sexual identity label. The way in which plurisexuals interpreted labels speaks to the power of language in creating categories that group us through conceptualising our experiences as distinct and discreet from one another:

> The ontological specification of being, negation, and their relations is understood to be determined by a language structured by the paternal law and its mechanisms of differentiation. A thing takes on the characterization of 'being' and becomes mobilized by that ontological gesture only within a structure of signification that, as the symbolic, is itself pre-ontological (Butler, 2007, p.59)

Butler is here referring to the fact that identities are illusory, in that they have no ontological basis but are rather established discursively to demonstrate how people's actions or experiences reflect (or not) social norms and ideals. In this sense, labels create divisions between people, allowing discrimination and oppression to flourish through demonstrating the variety of experience between people, and also create boundaries around our ability to engage in that experiences go against our label descriptions (i.e. to be a man is to not be a woman). Plurisexuals' descriptions of their feelings connected to labels echoed Butlerian thought. Plurisexuals troubled the usage of labels through suggesting they were restrictive and imperfect, creating siloed senses of self on the basis of gender preference in desire. These labels contributed to the creation of a monolithic identity that did not encompass the variability in sexual desire and practice witnessed by many plurisexuals. Plurisexuals approached labels as socially constructed, with no essentialist basis in reality. Labels were an imperfect descriptor of experience.

Research has previously demonstrated how identifying with a plurisexual label can be an important part of coming out. Levy and Harr found that for those belonging to religious communities, many used plurisexual identity labels as a useful way of helping them come out and find similarly minded communities (Levy and Harr, 2018). Levy and Harr also highlighted the frustration many plurisexuals had in being labelled as lesbian or gay based on the gender of their partner (2018). In fact, much research has been conducted that demonstrates how bisexuality, pansexuality, and other plurisexual terms can mean many different things for different people, with researchers emphasising the diversity of experiences and identities associated with multigendered attractions (Amestoy, 2001; Borver, Gurevich and Mathieson, 2001; Brenson, 2001; Halperin, 2009; Galupo, 2011; Belous and Bauman, 2017; Flanders, 2017; Mereish, Katz-Wise and Woulfe, 2017). This PhD study builds on these findings, demonstrating the complexity and usefulness of identity labels for individuals. In keeping with broad criticisms of labels, plurisexuals used multiple words to attempt to summarise their identities, with demographic forms ranging from 'bisexual' to more expansive labels such as 'biromantic demisexual' and 'polyamorous bisexual asexual'. In the course of the interviews, participants would mention other identities that were important to them, including kink, polyamory, and aromanticism. This categorical approach to labeling was viewed in contradictory ways by participants, who could see positives and negatives associated with the proliferation of labels:

> I see this tendency sometimes on Twitter and Tumblr and all of those places, where there's this desire to pin down every possible nuance of your identity and have a very long, long list of [labels]. And I think that can veer into a pathologising, taxonomising,

> museum-exhibit view of queerness, which isn't necessarily healthy. But at the same time, that can be a really empowering and useful… it feels like a kind of a resistance sometimes, I guess is what I'm trying to say
>
> *(Hyde, 26, Bisexual Asexual, AMAB Genderqueer Demiboy)*

This notion of labels as resistance recurred throughout the interviews. The empowerment and usefulness referred to by Hyde is suggestive of the ways in which adopting a plurisexual label, or multiple identity descriptors, helped individuals posit themselves outside of the cisheteronormative and monosexist social structures that limited plurisexual expression whilst also deconstructing sexual identity on the basis of gender preference through incorporating relationship models (i.e. polyamorous, kinky). However, some disagreed with the proliferation of labels as they could dilute the overall emancipatory aims of LGBTQ+ politics through fracturing the community into niche groups and interests:

> I do worry about the proliferation of labels in terms of labelling every single aspect of attraction […] I think it's helpful to highlight actual communal experiences and axes of oppression rather than 'here's my label that says I'm attracted to men on Mondays and only want to sleep with women when I become friends with them and it's a full moon' (laughs) […] that's covered by bisexual, you don't need that label
>
> *(Simone, 24, Bisexual, Cis woman)*

Simone's concerns echo significant portions of queer theoretical scholarship that often call for the deconstruction of sexual identity as a sole focus in studying sexuality so that, through deconstruction, it may be plausible to reach a utopic world where we embrace and occupy sexual experiences based on bodily and emotional pleasure as opposed to discursive categorisations (See for a description of these politics and theories: Gamson, 1995). Not many people agreed with Simone, with a majority content to allow labels to describe specific elements related to their sexualities, and a majority finding them useful ways of relating to others on the basis of their sexual or romantic desires.

Although participants perceived labels overall as problematic and divisive in the social world, participants often found validation in referring to a sexual identity label. Many spoke about the way in which labels served to clarify their identities:

> It's like Tetris where you finally have the pieces and you just say bisexual and everything's clear and it's like 'yes, that's what I am' - yeah it was very liberating […] hearing the word and applying it to myself and saying 'yeah it fits'
>
> *(Cristina, 33, Bisexual, Cisgender Woman)*

Identifying with a label can have many positive implications for self-growth, such as feeling authentic, feeling validated, and being able to explore one's sexuality (Rostosky *et al.*, 2010). Cristina's story highlights the way that labels can act as empowering words to feel a sense of belonging to something larger and that one's feelings are not weird, unusual or twisted – as a homophobic and monosexist social order might often have us think. Further, finding a plurisexual label and relating to it is a form of resistance against a monosexist ontology that often says that we cannot be plurisexual as it is 'not real'. This follows from Borver et al.'s work focused on bisexual women where bisexual women specifically chose to adopt the term 'bisexual' into their identities, even when facing the limited categorisation this label bestowed on them:

> [D]espite the discursive limits of the term "bisexual," there is both an epistemological and an ontological imperative to retain it as a way to mark a distinction between other sexual categories and thus validate the reality of [bisexual people's] lives. "Queer," despite encouraging inclusive political alliances, is construed as problematic because it potentially erodes the salient material and cultural specificities associated with being allocated and regulated by particular identity categories (Borver, Gurevich and Mathieson, 2001b, p.34).

Borver et al.'s study focused exclusively on Canadian women. However, this PhD study illustrates that Borver et al.'s conclusions hold fast across the variety of genders and nationalities that participated in this study, and expanded the focus from a bisexual-specific label, to labels more broadly amidst plurisexual people (i.e. pansexual, queer, bi+ and other identities also felt the same way). Further, research participants' views on labels suggested that adopting an identity label was a useful way of reframing their experiences from an ontological perspective, illustrative of the shift from a monosexist ontology to a plurisexual ontology, which was affirming in the face of discrimination and oppression. That is, a monosexist ontology suggests that desire can only *be* when directed at one gender. A monosexist ontology – typically accompanying a binary conception of gender - suggests that desire is only possibly when directed at men *or* women. Therefore, the ability to use an identity label indicative of a multigendered attraction necessarily highlights that desire can be multidirectional or expansive in nature, therefore changing an individual's understanding of ontology of desire from a monosexist ontology to a plurisexual ontology.

Participants used labels to describe their level of sexual attraction (i.e. asexual, demisexual), their relationship models (i.e. polyamorous, monogamous), and their sexual practices (i.e. kinky, vanilla). A large proportion of the participants had engaged in polyamory and/or kinky sexual practices at different points in their lives, however, this held different weights in terms of how participants understood their identities. As Jessie said:

> I'm polyamorous and that's kind of part of my sexual identity, relationship identity - where do we draw a line there? […] I'm polyamorous in practice as opposed to something innate
>
> *(Jessie, 44, Bisexual, Female/Genderqueer/Enby)*

In essence, Jessie believes that her polyamory is not an inextricable part of her identity in the same way that her bisexuality is, but was rather a relationship model and practice that she prefers. This distinction between ontological identities and relationship practices was an important point discussed amongst participants. Participants complicated identity through highlighting that their plurisexuality was one component of a broader sexuality that involved certain tastes in relationship models, sexual styles, and more or less sexual contact. Sexual identity - in reference to the gender that one is interested in - was too reductive for many participants, whose adoptions of multiple descriptors was more important in terms of demonstrating *how* they wanted to relate to other people as opposed to simply the *gender* of who they wanted to relate to.

The emphasis on gender in defining one's sexual identity for LGBTQ+ people is indicative of the wider social homophobia given that gender becomes the critical turning point that people base their opinions on whether something is 'normal' or 'abnormal' (Butler, 2007). Butler's sex-gender-desire matrix describes how genders are established as both oppositional and complementary leading to what is essentially compulsive heterosexuality (Rich, 1980; Butler, 2007). However, as LGBTQ+ identities threaten this sex-gender-desire matrix, the emphasis on the gender of their partner becomes more critical given that it deviates from a 'natural order' of appropriate gender behavior dictated by compulsive heterosexuality and the cisheteronormative social structure. Beyond this, the monosexist social ontology necessitates identifying by a plurisexual label to communicate a romantic or sexual attraction to others that is not limited to one gender. Although this is primarily the reason plurisexuals have to identify as such, many highlighted that their labels were often the least important things around their sexual identity in terms of how they practiced it with others. Labels were useful tools of self-understanding and self-acceptance in a homophobic and biphobic society, but ultimately when it came to the practicalities of navigating a relationship, plurisexual labels were the smallest

consideration in people's romantic and sexual lives. This finding is significant in a wider study of plurisexuality, where the majority of research conducted emphasises labels correlating to gender preferences as opposed to labels descriptive of relationship models and practices.

Plurisexual Self-Realisation

At the beginning of each interview, I asked the participants a simple warm-up question – why did you want to take part in this research? The answers varied from a desire to act as a good role model for other plurisexuals, to a desire to redress the known imbalance in academia and activism which tends to focus on lesbian and gay identities, to being interested in plurisexuality generally and, finally, to wishing to take part in something that could help them understand their own identities as a form of catharsis. Importantly however, everyone stated their position as someone who either identified as plurisexual, or who took part in plurisexual relationship dynamics. This was expected as during recruitment my adverts called for people who were 'sexually or romantically attracted to more than one gender'. However, it became apparent that many of the participants had struggled with feeling comfortable with their plurisexual identities at one point or another in their lives. This discomfort was not only due to the well-known social stigma that plurisexuals experience as a minoritised sexual group, but also due to the uncertainty that they felt regarding their own attraction and sexual desires and feeling uncomfortable with their claiming of a plurisexual identity. Many participants referred to the way in which they struggled to figure out their identities when they were younger, often in isolation without being able to speak to anyone:

> I remember writing in these very awkward teenage journals 'am I bisexual?' kind of thing
>
> *(Sarah, 30, Bisexual/Pansexual, Cis female)*

These instances of self-interrogation are common amongst plurisexual people (Knous, 2006). These questions that participants had about their identities led to attempts to seek information out regarding sexuality in general. This often led to a lot of online research on forums (Tumblr was specifically highlighted numerous times), as well as through means such as pornography.

> I did seek information. A lot of Googling. Googling 'am I lesbian' sort of thing [...] looking up demisexual, heteroromantic, homoromantic, homosexual, and thinking which of these am I?
>
> *(Simone, 24, Bisexual, Cis woman)*

Participants often explored through online mediums, as many said that there was a shame or fear associated with asking those around them. Few participants had active LGBTQ+ role models to question about their sexual identities. The lack of information available surrounding plurisexuality highlights the normalisation of heterosexuality and monosexism and the difficulties associated with coming out as LGBTQ+ in any form. The proliferation of labels associated with LGBTQ+ identities could present a complicated identity navigation, as participants had to sift through the potential options to find a way of describing themselves. Without an LGBTQ+ role model, the first hurdle to understanding potential queerness was difficult for many participants, however, many also spoke about the lack of plurisexual representation that meant that monosexism limited their ability to question plurisexual potentialities and relate their experiences to any form of plurisexuality. The consequences of not being able to rely on a label resulted in participants experiencing crushes and desires that they were not sure how to explain to themselves or to others:

> I had a very very close friendship with another girl which I think could have become romantic but I don't think either of us had the vocabulary to talk about that type of thing […] I remember thinking […] does that mean I'm attracted to her, does that mean I'm interested in her?' – and I couldn't ever really answer those questions. And I realised that yes I probably was
>
> *(Sarah, 30, Bisexual/Pansexual, Cis female)*

Sarah's difficulties in comprehending her sexual and romantic feelings towards her friend are indicative of the imposition of heterosexuality and monosexism on individuals as they are growing up. Narratives around sexuality often adopt an either/or binary dynamic which presents heterosexual or gay identities as more valid than plurisexual identity (Klein, 1993). For those growing up in a monosexist and heteronormative society, the inability to see a path to plurisexuality can mean that identity construction can be more confusing, resulting in participants feeling like *Sexual Outsiders,* alone and isolated in their attraction to multiple genders. Where participants had found a vocabulary for their identities, the next consideration was whether or not their experiences, desires, and feelings could apply to the narrow category labels available for them to structure their romantic and sexual desires:

> I know that bisexuality and pansexuality doesn't necessarily mean that it has to be evenly split, and equally for everything, but still – the fact that I do have a clear preference towards femininity and female – sometimes those make me feel a bit like 'do I qualify? Do I really?'

(Bern, 36, Pansexual, Genderfluid/Non binary)

Bern’s continued self-questioning is indicative of the feelings of many participants, who all – to some extent – had internalised biphobia to the point of querying their feelings against a supposed ideal bisexuality where individuals had an equal division of sexual and romantic attraction to all genders (Ochs, 1996). This internalised biphobia stems from monosexist narratives whereby individuals are consistently told that they may be heterosexual, gay or lesbian, but plurisexuality is an identity that cannot and does not exist (Eisner, 2013; Roberts, Horne and Hoyt, 2015). The majority of participants spoke about the way in which they had initially felt guilt and shame regarding their sexual identities as they were attempting to figure out their desires and romantic interests. Participants highlighted the typical stigma that they saw associated with plurisexuality, such as women being oversexualised, and men being seen as undesirable to date.

> There is still that idea that ‘oh you’re just greedy, oh you’re flighty, you’re just going to cheat on everybody else you need to settle down and actually pick a side’
>
> *(Jade-Louisa, 24, Bisexual, Cis woman)*

These concerns led many participants to feel that their sexualities were wrong, positing themselves as *Sexual Outsiders* who could not fit in with monosexist and homophobic expectations of gendered desire. For some participants, an initial same-gender interest propelled them to identifying as gay or lesbian before later realising that they were plurisexual. Lee entered into a relationship with a man and identified as gay, having previously had a girlfriend in high school, and only years later did he realise he was bisexual:

> To get to gay pornography you have to get through the usual hetero stuff […] I started to realise that some of the male, female stuff was useful […] when I fully committed myself to being gay when I realised I liked men, I only had male sexual partners, I only looked at gay pornography, and I just didn't even think about women […] after my relationship ended with my male partner [I] then suddenly realis[ed] that I find women attractive
>
> *(Lee, 27, Bisexual, Male)*

Lee’s experience is indicative of the role monosexism can have in shaping identities, as through feeling an attraction to men, Lee did not immediately connect with plurisexuality, but rather identified as gay.

Other participants who had previously identified as lesbian or gay spoke about a level of guilt or shame that they experienced in coming out as bisexual. Jessamy, a 34-year-old who had previously identified as a lesbian said:

> There were some guys and people of other expressions that I did find very attractive, and I couldn't ignore it. I tried to ignore it, I tried really hard – not because I thought it was wrong – I thought it was a little wrong – but I didn't like the idea that there was anything about myself that I didn't know
>
> *(Jessamy, 34, Bisexual, Cis woman)*

This experience was common, with a number of participants having a similar experience, speaking to the way in which bisexual erasure and bisexual invisibility operate in society, minimising the possibilities of being plurisexual and associating plurisexual identity with shame. As same-gender attraction is often understood as gay or lesbian by a prescriptive monosexual culture, many participants struggled to come to terms with a plurisexual identity.

For a few individuals who were assigned female at birth (AFAB), their female gender appearance at the time became a problem when attempting to interpret their sexual identities. These AFAB people talked about the fact that during their teen years, women kissing women was perceived as in vogue, or as sexual experimentation performed for the benefit of men. As a result of these social messages, this small number of AFAB people were confused as to whether they were actually plurisexual or whether they were simply performing sexuality for men:

> I think I was just feeling in the dark for ages […] I think it is just because 'oh girls get off with girls when they're drunk' and […] so I'd be like 'ah yeah this is just me, I'm drunk, this is just a bit of fun' and it's like well why? There's something underlying there? I clearly like lasses as well
>
> *(Gina, 24, Bisexual, Woman)*

The sexualisation of women, prominence of the male gaze, and belief that sexuality between two women or AFAB people is for male pleasure led many AFAB participants to feel unsure about their identities. In constructing their identities, many participants spoke about the way in which their uncertainty could be amplified or reduced based on the level of romantic or sexual experience that they were able to engage in. Jules spoke extensively about their feelings of uncertainty and doubt

regarding their identity. Jules is married to a heterosexual cis man and partnered with a non binary person, however, Jules has never dated or had any sexual experience with a cis woman. They spoke about their experiences with a degree of pain in their voice:

> I don't know if authenticity questions will dog me forever or if I will eventually find a space like now where knowing how attracted to [non binary partner] I am, there's no way this is fake
>
> *(Jules, 32, Pansexual, Non binary)*

Jules felt that their pansexual identity was confirmed upon meeting their current non binary partner, and enjoying having sex with them when their partner was performing traditionally feminine or masculine roles in the bedroom:

> I've been completely stunned by the force of how I feel about [my non binary partner […] so I'm definitely not just into guys
>
> *(Jules, 32, Pansexual, Non binary)*

However, Jules continued in the course of the interview to say:

> I still haven't had sex with a cis woman […] I would like to have that experience to validate myself, to tell myself that I'm not lying to myself in this bizarre way
>
> *(Jules, 32, Pansexual, Non binary)*

Although Jules felt comfortable in knowing that they were attracted to more than just cis men, they were still left uncertain regarding their identity until they had had the full gamut of the experience with all genders. Jules' uncertainty was also related to their gender identity as a non binary person, which will be further discussed in Chapter 8. This escalating comfort with one's identities through having a variety of romantic or sexual experiences was echoed by most other participants. Although many people seemed to phrase their uncertainty regarding their sexual identities as somewhat uncomfortable, using language that suggested tension and unease, some participants could not have cared less about where their identity eventually ended up:

> There's never really been a big coming out, this is who I am, and 'oh I've now recognised my true self' – it's always been a bit walking along the road and 'oh I'm going this way now' and 'oh I'm here' […] it's never really been very dramatic
>
> *(Carys, 34, Bisexual, Female)*

Although some participants did not mind whether they had a certain identity for themselves, many disliked the uncertainty they had regarding their own sexual identities, feeling that they should be able to know themselves and define themselves. For the majority of participants this was connected to wanting to be authentic, wanting to respect different identities through not coopting them dishonestly, and wanting to be able to know oneself. Many participants saw an identity label as a buffer against the incredulity of a monosexist social order, a tool through which to justify and explain their identity to those who would question it, and a way of connecting oneself to a wider community of likeminded people that fought against a monosexist social order. However, in claiming identities, participants were cautious given the messaging of the dominant monosexist ontology that suggests it is only possible to be attracted to one gender. Many were *Sexual Outsiders* prior to accepting a plurisexual ontology where it was possible to experience multigendered desire.

6.2 Letting It Fly: Monosexism and Homophobia in Disclosure and Community

Jules' Story

As a PhD researcher, I embarked on this PhD project because I have struggled to be accepted as a bisexual/queer person throughout my life. When I first came out, there was no homophobia, but lots of laughter as bisexuality was not perceived as being a plausible identity. I went back in the closet. I came back out years later, promptly joined an LGBTQ+ group and was told in my first meeting that I would eventually 'make the full jump to lesbian.' One notable ex-lover spent a significant amount of our relationship trying to convince me that I was a lesbian. Ironically, when we broke up after a year, she came out as bisexual and started dating a man. Whenever I tell strangers that my PhD is about bisexuality, people often respond with 'oh go on then, tell me – is it real or not?' The monosexism that initially is internalised for plurisexuals is soon apparent in social and communal dynamics as plurisexuals have to navigate disclosure and finding communities on the basis of their identities.

Jules' relationship with coming out and finding community is difficult. Jules is a 32-year-old non binary pansexual who is married to a cis man, and polyamorously partnered to a non binary person. The conversation I had with Jules is one that I vividly remember, as – at the time – I was identifying as a monogamous cis woman, and had not yet begun my own explorations of polyamory

and identifying as non binary. I listened to them raptly, having not met many people who talked as openly as Jules did about their identities. Jules’ story was also emotionally taxing for both of us; Jules spoke openly of a lot of pain, guilt, and shame associated with their identities and their previous experiences. In relation to identity, Jules spoke about how they had agonised over their pansexual, polyamorous, and non binary identities as they tried to come to terms with their thoughts and experiences and phrase them in a way that made sense to them. However, what was most difficult for Jules was coming out to anyone around them. Jules said that they were very guarded about their identities, choosing carefully who they would come out to. Though there were LGBTQ+ people at their workplace, there were no bisexuals or pansexuals, and there was no one that was openly polyamorous or non binary. Consequently, Jules hid all of their identities at work as they were concerned that they would be shunned by their colleagues. In discussing this further, Jules said that:

> I would suffer psychologically if some people's relationships to me changed […] the last thing that I want is someone that I can always count on to turn around and say, 'well I don't approve of your lifestyle' and then suddenly I can't work with them as well.

Jules’ fear of homophobia, biphobia, and other judgments on their personal life led them to pass as heterosexual, cis, and monogamous. As a result of the desire to cover their identities, Jules felt that they did not have a strong community of LGBTQ+ people. In querying whether there even was an LGBTQ+ community, Jules said that there were multiple communities, but not one overarching bond. They felt that as a result of passing, their entry into an LGBTQ+ community would not be accepted as people would not believe that they were genuine. However, they said their primary reason for not engaging with a sense of LGBTQ+ community was the infighting:

> I think the biggest thing that makes me feel excluded is this fixation on saying the right thing and being seen to be the right thing […] there's only so much social justice we can take on as individuals […] and there's a lot of people who would get really aggressive about things like that […] it all becomes a bit of a hornets’ nest.

As a result, Jules did not feel a sense of community as they did not fulfill the image of the ideal community member who was invested in every debate and lived openly as opposed to passing. Jules’ points around coming out and community were clearly entrenched in the fear of reprisal from homophobic, biphobic, or otherwise intolerant people. Jules was unwilling to risk their relationships

and social standing through coming out, which is indicative of the levels of homophobia and biphobia present in society that restrict people from coming out.

The following section explores firstly experiences of homophobia and monosexism in disclosing plurisexual identities, before later exploring feelings of community and belonging amongst plurisexuals. It is apparent that in addition to homophobia, the monosexist social ontology makes it difficult for plurisexuals to come out and to find space in LGBTQ+ communities.

Homophobia and Monosexism: Issues in Disclosure

Participants found the disclosure of their identities important to their lives. Coming out could benefit those around them who were also struggling with an LGBTQ+ identity. This disruption of homophobia and mononormativity was important for many of the participants:

> I think if you can be out, you should be out. And you can be out for other people who can't be out, and I think that's important
>
> *(Alice, 32, Bisexual/Queer, Cis woman)*

This notion of being a visible role model, a person who claimed a plurisexual identity in the face of monosexism and homophobia, was spoken about by many of the participants of this study, and often connected to why they had taken part in this study – to be able to represent their identities so that others could relate. Although this notion of being a role model for other plurisexuals was important, when asked whether it was important for others to know their sexuality, participants had conflicting answers. Almost all participants referred to the importance of their friends knowing, but answers regarding the family and workplace were more conflicted. Broadly speaking, most participants said something similar to "I don't hide it, but I also don't publicise it" (Bern, 36, Pansexual, Genderfluid/Non binary). Although most people did not make a point of publicising their identities, many felt it important for people to understand their plurisexuality as sexual identity was an important part of themselves. For some the burden of hiding and discreetly managing an identity was too much:

> [Being openly plurisexual is important] on the grounds that I don't want to hide anything […] it's tiring. It's not something I want to do […] it's not something I really want to think about […] I want to have the freedom of just being myself really
>
> *(Jake, 21, Bisexual, Man)*

The participants' desire for authenticity links with McLean's (2007) exploration of the interaction between bisexuality and the disclosure imperative. McLean's research demonstrates that disclosing one's sexual identity is positioned as a positive experience, where one can declare one's authenticity. However, McLean demonstrated that for bisexuals, social and internalised monosexism was a key deterrent in coming out due to the stigma around bisexuality, and one's continued uncertainty regarding one's identity. Consequently, disclosing one's sexual orientation as a bisexual was not necessarily a desirable action (McLean, 2007). The findings of this PhD project reflect the ambivalence McLean describes, with many participants desiring to come out, though many were not necessarily out to all people in their lives given the potential social reprisals. The fact that one had to come out at all was picked up as a point of conflict for some participants. Many participants resented the process of disclosure, torn between the importance of being able to communicate their identity and the discomfort in disclosing their identities to others:

> If you're having to come out to your parents, that means they've done something wrong. That means they've raised you in a hostile environment, where you haven't just been able to be queer from the beginning and not have to explain yourself
>
> *(Hyde, 26, Bisexual Asexual, AMAB Genderqueer Demiboy)*

Some plurisexuals felt that disclosure reinforced homophobia, monosexism, and heteronormativity through having to 'come out' as a minoritised sexual identity. This was not a universal opinion on the act of coming out, with many discussing it in a way that suggested it was a mundane expectation if one had a sexual identity that deviated from the norm of heterosexuality. This was complicated by the fact that due to people's choices in partners, they were often assumed to be lesbian, gay, or heterosexual depending on the genders present in a relationship and would have to verbally disclose their identities after assumptions were made on their visual demonstration of their sexualities. This difference in the performance of plurisexuality was commented on specifically by Abha when she compared the coming out experience for lesbians, gay men, and plurisexuals:

> I think when you're gay […] you come out and then you live as a gay person and it can be really fucking difficult at the time, but then when it happens it's done
>
> *(Abha, 30, Bisexual, Cis female)*

Abha felt that, comparatively, plurisexuals had a difficult time of their identities as they had to continuously communicate and consolidate their identities to those around them. This is indicative of the monosexist social ontology that plurisexuals have to work around in being and doing their sexual identities. Participants referred to the ways in which they pointed to their sexual experiences, used humor, or discussed political issues to reinforce their sexual identities to those around them, in keeping with previous research on bisexuality and visibility (Hartman, 2013; Hartman-Linck, 2014). The need to disclose a label created a tension for the plurisexual experience, where many people wished to be openly plurisexual to give them a sense of freedom and authenticity, but resented or feared the act of disclosing their identities to others.

Participants discussed how disclosing one's identity could result in a negative backlash due to homophobia and monosexism. A number of people talked about the ways in which sexuality and gender expression could be policed in social spaces, such as schools:

> [At school] gay and lesbo were chucked around as insults all the time […] I was attracted to all sorts of genders but I didn't want to be because it was seen as something bad, it was an insult, it was something that was tossed around and for the popular kids to scrawl on your notebook
>
> *(Jade-Louisa, 24, Bisexual, Cis woman)*

Schools and families are sites through which gender and sexuality roles are reinforced in heteronormative and cisnormative ways (Etaugh and Liss, 1992; Abbott, Ellis and Abbott, 2015). As a result, many participants received messages that anything other than heterosexuality was inappropriate and shameful. Bern remembered a period during his youth where a male schoolfriend was seen kissing another boy:

> [My mum] asked me with a really worried face 'you're not gay are you?' […] I said 'no, of course not' and I knew that much was true [then she asked] 'you're not even bi are you?' and I denied it as well, but with a little more doubt perhaps. It was more denial out of fear and not knowing
>
> *(Bern, 36, Pansexual, Genderfluid/Non binary)*

Bern's lack of certainty relates to the internalised biphobia discussed earlier, wherein participants were unsure as to whether they were plurisexual due to concerns around whether plurisexuality was

real or not. This was due to being raised in structures that supported a monosexist ontology, where it would not be possible to conceive of a multigendered desire. The way in which gender and sexuality were policed within social units had significant impacts on people's experiences. Most participants had experienced either passive or active negative responses to disclosing a non-hetero or monosexual identity to family members. Some were more upsetting than others:

> If [my dad] ever admitted to somebody else that he's got a gay son or a bisexual son or something that's not straight, then he would get stick at work. He would get taunted […] to this day, my parents have said 'don't tell even family members, just let them assume you're straight' […] I don't tend to talk about this stuff socially. Perhaps occasionally with my best friend, but otherwise it doesn't really enter the equation
>
> *(Lee, 27, Bisexual, Male)*

> I came out [to my parents]. But it was quite scary. I was texting one of my friends and he was like 'oh now you're going to be lynched' or something, because that's quite possible. My parents are very cool and everything, but you never know when you're alone
>
> *(Rishabh, 22, Bisexual, Male)*

The fact that Rishabh literally feared death speaks volumes to the impact that heteronormativity and mononormativity can have on an individual – Rishabh particularly connected this fear to the fact that he is Indian and his belief that India is more conservative as regards sexuality than the UK. For some participants, the fear of disclosing their sexual identities was linked to them having seen the people they wished to disclose their identity to saying homophobic or monosexist/biphobic things. Others felt that they could not disclose their identities to some people for fear of them rejecting them:

> I have this thing in my head that I owe [my dad] £100 […] If I don't owe him any money, we're on a level playing field and I can just tell him who I am […] I do have that worry of him rejecting me […] I wouldn't like him to be weird about it and then me owe him money
>
> *(Stan, 26, Queer/Bisexual, Cis man)*

Some participants had actively experienced negative reactions after coming out. Lee initially came out as a gay man before later realising his bisexuality. When he came out as gay to his parents, then his father had the following response:

> I remember him just sitting on the floor of the kitchen crying just saying 'what have I done wrong? what have I done wrong?
>
> *(Lee, 27, Bisexual, Male)*

Lee had not come out as bisexual to his parents at the point of his interview, as they had since accepted his status as a gay man, and he felt they would disapprove of his bisexuality. Many other participants similarly adopted strategies that involved not coming out:

> I haven't come out to my mum […] recently she was sectioned and is now in supportive housing, so I don't feel it's appropriate to come out to her while she's on medication because I wouldn't want that to affect her mental health in that way
>
> *(Daniel, 26, Bisexual, Cis male)*

Even where people *had* come out to family or friends, then participants sometimes found that their disclosure could be quickly forgotten as in the case for Max:

> People just forget […] people forget because I'm going out with someone who appears as quite a masculine person, so they just assume that it's like I've made up my mind, that I'm done now
>
> *(Max, 20, Bisexual, Female/Genderqueer)*

Max came out to their parents years ago, and they spoke about the way in which their parents seemed to have forgotten about their bisexuality. The problem of maintaining a visibly plurisexual identity is that it cannot be performed based on the partners one enters into relationships with, but rather must be discursively reinforced at various points in someone's life. The inability of Max's parents to remember their identity is indicative of the monosexism permeating society which results in assumptions around sexuality based on a partner's gender.

Participants who were in monogamous relationships often felt that they could 'hide' in their relationships. This was particularly true for participants when they were initially coming to terms with their identities and figuring out whether or not to disclose their identities. Some people chose not to talk about it with their partners, such as Jessamy who had previously identified as a lesbian:

> [On realising bisexuality and being in a monogamous long-term relationship] That was a pretty useful smokescreen and I didn't even need to tell her, I certainly didn't tell myself, it didn't need to be said, it didn't matter because it wasn't going to come up
>
> *(Jessamy, 34, Bisexual, Cis woman)*

Although Jessamy found that being in a relationship with a woman could cover her sexual identity, she also discussed how she felt uncomfortable that she could not discuss her relationship status with her partner:

> [Coming out] was a long drawn out process and there were a few times when I was like 'I should tell me wife because I should be able to talk to my wife about this stuff' and I still couldn't do it, for years
>
> *(Jessamy, 34, Bisexual, Cis woman)*

Generally, the negotiation of being out about their sexual identity whilst valuing their partners' was sometimes a difficult balance due to fears of stigma. Rishabh summarised the complexities of coming out to someone that he was romantically interested in:

> I think coming out to them gives them the wrong signal, like gives them the idea that […] you're just fulfilling one side of the story, that you might be interested in males or females if you're dating someone […] that sounds as if like I'm going to date you but I'm also going to date someone else, you know
>
> *(Rishabh, 22, Bisexual, Male)*

Rishabh's concerns over the impact of disclosing a plurisexual identity in a relationship are supported by the fact that counselling literature discusses the difficulties experienced by mixed orientation couples when a partner discloses plurisexuality (Buxton, 2006, 2011, 2012; Breno and Galupo, 2007; Klesse, 2011). Unfortunately, being plurisexual can be seen as an unappealing trait in a partner. These findings contribute to a sociological interpretation of this phenomenon, emphasising the gendered monosexist dynamics implicit in these experiences.

Homophobia and monosexism resulted in many participants passing as either heterosexual or gay at varying points in their lives, either to partners, a wider social circle, family, or in work. The

majority of participants who discussed passing as monosexual felt that it was useful in certain contexts, but overall disliked passing as they felt guilt over hiding their identities from those around them. However, plurisexuals generally spoke about passing in a way that suggested it was a useful tool in navigating society to receive a better response from those around them, whether they were passing as gay or heterosexual, it was often considered easier or more acceptable than plurisexuality. The overall reasons for passing were complex. Many were not out to their families for a variety of reasons, feeling that they did not need to come out until they were in a serious same gender relationship. Some were not out in the workplace for fear of sexual harassment or discrimination. The reasons for not coming out ranged from a sense of privacy, to a fear of rejection or reprisal. The notion of bisexual privilege is often discussed in LGBTQ+ activism, and suggests that plurisexuals are able to pass as heterosexual and consequently hold a degree of privilege unavailable to LG people. In reality, this is not a privilege but rather an omission that causes feelings of guilt and isolation, as Hodgson describes in her *Guardian* opinion piece on the impact of heterophobia from LG communities, homophobia from heterosexual communities, and biphobia from all (Hodgson, 2017). Many people discussed the ability to use their differently gendered relationships as a shield as people would perceive them as heterosexual, however, as is the case with Jules' story, many participants referred to feelings of guilt in not being openly plurisexual. It is the case that homophobia and monosexism operated simultaneously to ensure that participants felt that their identities were not normative, required disclosure, and could be met with disbelief, violence, or rejection from those around them. Consequently, many participants talked about the importance of a wider LGBTQ+ community for feeling at-home in their identities. These findings contribute to further knowledge around plurisexuality, as Lingel is one of the only pieces I know of that explicitly discusses bisexual passing, and Lingel did not look at what might contextualise passing for certain groups of people in terms of who they are not out to, when they are not out to them, or why they are not out to them (Lingel, 2009).

LGBTQ+ Communities and the Denial of Plurisexuality

Upon discovering and disclosing their identities, many participants spoke about the necessity of finding LGBTQ+ friends or communities to be a part of. Previous research has highlighted how homophobic and biphobic social environments mean that community becomes important for LGBTQ+ people to connect with one another (Traies, 2015; Formby, 2017). Plurisexual participants spoke about LGBTQ+ connections being important so that people could understand them:

> I've always had LGBT friends, I've never known what it is like not to have them […] if I didn't have them […] I'd sort of feel like a bit of an outcast and not quite sure what to do,

> how do I talk to people about whatever feelings I've been having towards a person who is not male
>
> *(Gillian, 29, Bisexual, Woman)*

Many participants suggested that although having LGBTQ+ connections were important in allowing them to relate to others on the basis of a shared minoritised identity, informed cis heterosexual allies could also be of benefit – although for the most part when speaking about community, participants referred primarily to LGBTQ+ spaces and organisations. Many participants felt that seeing LGBTQ+ identities in their personal social groups was important, not only to redress the stigmas associated with plurisexuality, but also as it helped people come to terms with their own identities.

> I think (having an LGBT friendship group gives) a sort of warmth knowing you have been an outsider […] for me personally, all the LGBT people I meet I feel more comfortable talking about - it sounds really cheesy - sorrow in a lot of ways, because people just instantly get it
>
> *(Kal, 32, Pansexual, Cis woman)*

Participants broadly discussed a shared understanding amongst other LGBTQ+ people, and the reduced need to explain one's identity. However, standards of LGBTQ+ or plurisexual feelings of community were also seen as unrealistic to maintain in everyday life:

> Being in a queer space all the time is really nice. But you know when you go outside and you're like 'oh yeah it's not always like this is it?'
>
> *(Jacub, 22, Bisexual, Man)*

Many participants felt similarly to Jacub in that their experience of being fully accepted and understood was as a result of them carefully curating their experiences, and that functioning in the 'outside' meant coming across people who would not understand them. A small number of people rejected the idea of an LGBTQ+ community by suggesting there was no such thing:

> I don't think there is an LGBT community of any sort […] saying the LGBT community is the same thing as saying the blonde community – there is no such thing
>
> *(Jules, 32, Pansexual, Non binary)*

Jules' comments reflect how the concept of LGBTQ+ communities have been troubled by reports of racism, biphobia, classism, and ableism that means that many LGBTQ+ are ostracised. Formby writes of how a monolithic concept of an LGBTQ+ community is false, as many people are excluded from this (Formby, 2017). Participants discussed how plurisexual identities were often ostracised or rejected from wider LGBTQ+ communities due to monosexism and biphobia, which is in keeping with previous research that has demonstrated that plurisexuals have a difficult relationship with the LGBTQ+ community, often experiencing biphobia and a lack of acceptance regarding their identities (Rust, 2000; Welzer-Lang, 2008; MacNeela and Murphy, 2015; Johnson, 2016; Formby, 2017). In fact, Barker et al. and Crowley have discussed the specific benefits of having a plurisexual-specific community (Barker *et al.*, 2008; Crowley, 2010). This PhD study further consolidates these suggestions through highlighting how a monosexist social ontology has established the 'impossibility' of plurisexual identities, therefore requiring plurisexuals to bolster one another through representation and role modelling, or through struggling to develop a plurisexual ontology in isolation.

Jessamy had previously identified as a lesbian, and said that throughout that time she had been biphobic. In ruminating on the biphobia in LGBTQ+ circles, she said:

> People can be very protective of their sub communities to the point that they see anything as a threat – even having that emotion or that inclination is a threat somehow to them and their sovereignty and you're just somehow diluting their feminine power […] it's a paradox of being so very pro-equality and so anti-equality at the same time
>
> *(Jessamy, 34, Bisexual, Cis woman)*

Biphobic occurrences within LGBTQ+ communities came up time and time again throughout participant interviews, with discussions of the stigmas associated with plurisexuality of cheating, greediness, and indecisiveness that were evident in both lesbian and gay spaces. Participants also stated that biphobia came from heterosexual spaces too, however, it was often more painful coming from LGBTQ+ spaces as they were purportedly there to support minoritised sexual identities. This discrimination took many forms, but a common interpretation was the way in which people fail to accept plurisexualities as a genuine or acceptable identity, or attempt to change plurisexuals – "my straight friends would tell me to be straight and my gay friends told me to be gay" (Rishabh, 22, Bisexual, Male) – or it could be through the erasure of plurisexual identities:

> [My partner and I] might look like a cis-het couple from the outside […] but he's bi […] I think some of [my colleagues] were like 'oh why are you going to Pride now' […] and it's like well, I'm non binary anyway and that's part of the LGBT community regardless, and bi people have a right to be there whether they're in a straight relationship or not
>
> *(Kaden, 23, Bisexual, Non binary)*

Many participants spoke about the erasure or invalidation of plurisexual identities within lesbian, gay, and heterosexual spaces, reflecting research findings which illustrate the same issues (Mulick and Jr., 2002; McLean, 2008; Welzer-Lang, 2008; Roberts, Horne and Hoyt, 2015). Although these experiences were common, most participants had not found a plurisexual-specific community:

> I don't really see a bisexual community, it just doesn't seem to exist to me […] I realise that loads of my friends are bi, we've just never talked about it […] and I have actually got this community, but it's invisible even if you're in it
>
> *(Stan, 26, Bisexual, Cis man)*

Although, similar to Stan, many had plurisexual friends, these identities were often overshadowed by lesbian and gay culture. In LGBTQ+ communities, the act of loving and desiring the same gender took cultural precedence over plurisexual identity, in that spaces were separated into same-gender and different-gender dynamics along monosexist lines. Consequently, it was difficult to be entirely oneself in LGBTQ+ communities. The notion of bisexual/plurisexual unity was important for many participants as they felt that they had a distinctive experience from other minoritised sexual identities that adhered to monosexist social ontologies:

> I always think that gay people have more in common with straight people in terms of sexuality […] I can't understand gay people or straight people and their sexuality because I'm like 'what's wrong with the other half of the population, do you not understand?' Whereas both of those groups are like 'why are you going for both halves of the population?'
>
> *(Max, 20, Bisexual, Female/Genderqueer)*

Max's perspective demonstrates a plurisexual epistemology and the consequent difficulties in thinking through a plurisexual lens in a monosexist world where one cannot be understood. In essence, Max's conclusions suggest that a plurisexual epistemology (where one embraces that sexuality and gender

need not correlate in any form) is in stronger opposition to a monosexist social ontology (where sexuality and gender need to relate unidirectionally). Although plurisexuals experience both the homophobic social current, and the monosexist social ontology, Max perceives the latter as being the greatest obstacle to living one's plurisexual life.

Beyond biphobia and monosexism, some participants also talked about racism in LGBTQ+ communities. In speaking about an attempt to join lesbian groups, Jacq highlighted the racism and biphobia they had experienced:

> I'd only ever heard bad things about lesbians and gay people, but the one good thing I'd heard was that they treat each other like family [...] I went to these spaces 'I'm bisexual' and you just get these looks, and at one group, being told 'don't come back' - in a black lesbian group [...] that kind of rejection still hurts many years later
>
> *(Jacq, 49, Bisexual, Non binary)*

> [A bisexual event is the reason that a bisexual BAME group] came into being [...] one of the organisers was making Islamophobic and racist comments on the [...] actual channel that was to be used [for bisexual event] for announcements and things [...] we were the only people saying this isn't on. And his response was 'I can't be racist; I teach English as a foreign language' - so that kind of showed what awareness he had. But it was just really disappointing as well about how little white people spoke up
>
> *(Jacq, 49, Bisexual, Non binary)*

Jacq was rejected or made to feel uncomfortable in two communities that they should have been accepted into. The complex relationship between sexuality and BAME people has been previously explored, and suggests that BAME people are regularly seen as hypersexual or asexual dependent on their ethnicity (Nagel, 2003; Collins, 2006). Furthermore, the very notion of binary sexual and gender identities is a colonial concept that historically controlled minoritised bodies' gender and sexuality identities and expressions, for example, limiting the experience and recognition of people who identified as Hijra and Two-Spirit people (Williams, 1992; Dutta, 2012; Debold, 2018). Formby has demonstrated how interactions between race and sexuality mean that BAME people occupy a marginal position within the LGBTQ+ communities as racism is rife (Formby, 2017). For those who experienced discrimination due to aspects of their identities, expressing oneself was difficult. Cristina is a Latina bisexual woman living and working in the Midlands, and part of an active LatinX community.

Cristina felt unable to merge all the parts of herself together to draw together a community of like-minded people:

> I've always felt like I don't quite belong anywhere, and that was reinforced when I came out. I feel like the world's loneliest whale, who sings in a different frequency so other whales will never hear him/her […] A few weeks ago, I was at a get-together […] and there comes that one "joke" that opens your eyes and makes you uncomfortable. That joke came, and […] that was it for me. "I don't want to be here. I don't want to hang out with them anymore". And there goes another piece of a community to which supposedly I belonged here; I say good riddance, but it's also disappointing. It feels like my bisexuality is a nice joyful bubble, but it's how I felt attending Pride last year for the first time: outside of it, the world outside was exactly the same, oblivious to what that event meant or even that it had happened
>
> *(Cristina, 33, Bisexual, Cis gender woman)*

Cristina's inability to find a space where she felt comfortable in all aspects of her identity was particularly common amongst LGBTQ+ BAME participants, but was also evident in the experiences of trans and non binary participants.

In brief, communities are often monosexist and exclude plurisexuals. However, beyond that, the impacts of racism, ableism, and other exclusionary forces are still significant in LGBTQ+ and heterosexual spaces. It is important to adopt an intersectional approach to exploring sexuality and gender to fully realise the impact of these dynamics.

6.3 Living Your Life: Navigating Monosexism and Homophobia

Max's story

This section explores the way in which participants developed strategies to deal with feelings of shame, fear, and guilt regarding their sexual identities. For many participants, the guilt and shame they underlined stemmed from feeling that they could not fit a heteronormative narrative. Max was one such participant, a young female/genderqueer person, but at 20 years old someone who had self-assurance and wisdom regarding their sexuality and gender. I learned a lot from Max and they made me consider many things in my own life. Max attended an all-girls grammar school, and when they were 13 years old, it became trendy to come out as bisexual. As time passed, Max found themselves shifting into a monosexist environment where they were part of "a really unhealthy incestuous LGBT group and if you went out with a guy you'd be basically shunned." When Max was 15 and figuring out both their bisexuality and genderqueer identity, they were confused and in crisis as they tried to

understand these elements of their identity. At the time, Max was romantically interested in their best friend who identified as a lesbian and who continuously told Max "I'm not going to go out with you until you decide whether you're straight or gay." Max felt extremely uncertain and shamed about their identity as they saw their best friend as the authority on LGBTQ+ issues. Max later met another bisexual and after seeing how they maintained their identity in the face of dismissal, Max became more comfortable and unashamed about their bisexuality.

Max still occasionally experiences difficulties. As being bisexual became more important in their social life, Max felt that they had to disclose their sexual identity to their parents. After disclosing, Max's mother did not speak to them for four days, after which Max returned to university and then "next time I saw her she was absolutely fine […] I think she's conveniently forgotten." In the face of this lack of support, Max developed techniques to frame their experiences. Max forgave those who forget their bisexuality (and assumed they were heterosexual or gay) because "it's my identity not theirs." Furthermore, Max had felt they had done the hard work of disclosing their sexuality to their family, and consequently they were free of guilt as they could not control further outcomes. The way in which Max described their experiences moved me, and I was struck at some of the injustices and intolerance that Max had experienced – however, they did not see it as such. They had let go of the fear, guilt, and shame, and protected their sense of identity through framing the way in which they thought about things in a healthy, laissez-faire way. Max refused to take on other people's shame, guilt, or fear about their identities, and was willing instead to focus on the people around them who supported their sense of identity and self.

Max's experience speaks to the way in which guilt and shame are often experienced as a result of social pressure and social expectation, and the onus is often placed onto the individual to work through these feelings of guilt and shame to reconcile with a healthy, positive and empowered sense of identity. This level of emotion work was indicative of many people's experiences of shame, guilt, and fear – primarily, these feelings came from external sources and were not innate to developing a minoritised sexual identity. Shame, guilt, and fear come from those who prioritised heteronormativity and mononormativity, and plurisexuals must pass through these currents and develop their own coping mechanisms to overcome these feelings, often independently or through actively seeking LGBTQ+ friends. The way in which participants came to know these things was through developing a plurisexual epistemology, a way of knowing that their experiences were valid and differ from a monosexist epistemology.

Emotion-work, Reframing, and Techniques in Maintaining a Plurisexual Identity

Emotion-work is when an individual manages their countenance to support other people (Hochschild, 1979). This can mean that people respond to things in ways that follow latent rules, following conventions of feelings that allow people to bond together (Hochschild, 1979). For LGBTQ+ people, in many ways their emotions go *against* conventions of feelings, that are typically heteronormative and encourage love and desire orientated towards someone of a different gender. Consequently, many LGBTQ+ people have to engage in extreme levels of emotional labour to negotiate the feelings of their heterosexual friends, families, and colleagues, so that they can live their life without upsetting others. This can mean that LGBTQ+ people educate others, pass as heterosexual, do not talk about their love lives, or engage in a variety of techniques to make it easier for people who are heterosexual to understand them. Importantly, as Hochschild (1979) writes, connecting to people emotionally is important to build connections. Through failing to/being unable to follow conventions of emotion, LGBTQ+ people risk their social connections. The processes of emotional labour relevant to plurisexual people are due to monosexism and homophobia, which make it difficult to relate to others. This section explores how plurisexuals engage in techniques related to emotion-work to feel comfortable in their plurisexual identities in themselves and for others.

The majority of participants had struggled with guilt, fear, or shame related to their sexual identity at some point in their lives. However, it is worth noting that some participants never felt any guilt or fear whatsoever regarding their sexual identities:

> I think because it took me until I was 21 to realise I was bi then I was like I'm quite comfortable with who I am now and I've never felt bad about it. I'm really lucky actually
>
> *(Gina, 24, Bisexual, Woman)*

> I was about 30 the first thing I tried anything with a bloke - and it was just curiosity really. I had thought about it for maybe a year or two and then I just thought well why not just try it? What harm could it do? And I enjoyed it
>
> *(Dave, 57, Bisexual, Male)*

> I've never felt uncomfortable with my sexuality really
>
> *(Elizabeth, 45, Undefinable, Woman)*

> I'm attracted to both men and women. I don't know. I've never really given it too much thought, I've never had to kind of battle it out with myself too much I think. I suppose I'm kind of lucky that way
>
> *(Isabelle, 24, Bisexual, Female)*

It is possible that these participants felt no guilt or shame regarding their sexual identity due to their familial upbringing and geographical location. The majority of participants who had a lack of shame or guilt were middle class, highly educated, and cis women.[9] It is possible that these conditions may have made their experiences easier, and perhaps their environments were not as heteronormative or prescriptive regarding sexual and gender expression – if an environment facilitates variations in sexual and gender expression, Katz-Wise and Hyde suggest that individuals in these circumstances come to terms with their identities more easily (Katz-Wise and Hyde, 2017).

Many participants had to overcome their feelings of shame and guilt regarding their plurisexual identities by finding ways to feel positive and empowered, often without external help or support:

> I was brought up a Christian, I was very devout […] there was always that part of me that was like 'this is kind of a bit wrong' although that never really sat well with me and I always sort of thought 'no if I'm bi that's who I am and God's not going to strike me down for that'
>
> *(Sarah, 30, Bisexual/Pansexual, Cis female)*

Sarah's experience of devout Christianity had led her to being exposed to institutional homophobia and monosexism that she had to extract herself from alone. The kind of conclusions that participants had to make regarding the acceptability of their identities were often done individually, without external influence or support. These stories of becoming comfortable with one's identity in isolation were common among participants. Similar to Max's story, participants had to do the work of ensuring

[9] Dave was an outlier in this regard, and his story is somewhat complicated as he views his relationships with men as purely sexual release and has not told anyone in his life that he is bisexual, instead using websites and ad sites to meet other men. He has no intention of coming out, feeling that no one needs to know.

that they did not take on other people's feelings of guilt, shame, and fear regarding sexuality and gender. Participants had to trust in their own feelings as not deserving of shame and policing to accept that their identities were appropriate. Participants had to perform much emotional labour in shucking off other people's feelings of disgust at their identity, and reconcile their own feelings of pride counter to the fear, shame, and guilt otherwise engendered in a homophobic and monosexist society.

Although many plurisexuals discussed their historical feelings of shame, fear, and guilt regarding their identity, it became apparent that for most participants, these feelings of shame and guilt had been reframed and that they regarded themselves more positively. Some had actively transformed their frames of reference so that they felt pride in their identities. Daniel was very proud to be bisexual due to how that made him unique:

> I'm bisexual but thinking of how unique it makes me and thinking how […] I don't want to have to be like everyone else […] when I was growing up and came to terms with being bisexual that I realised I didn't want that to change
>
> *(Daniel, 26, Bisexual, Cis male)*

Others had simply acknowledged that their sexual identities were an inextricable part of their lives, and by virtue of its existence, they could take pleasure in their sexual identities in their everyday lives:

> [My sexuality] is as much a part of me as a part of how I interact with the world as the fact that I'm 5 foot. It's just how it is
>
> *(Jade-Louisa, 24, Bisexual, Cis woman)*

> I think it's just like an intrinsic part of me, I don't really think about but also if it wasn't there I would be very confused
>
> *(Max, 20, Bisexual, Female/Genderqueer)*

The necessity of categorisations becomes important here, contrary to the deconstructive intentions of much queer theory. Participants felt that their sexuality as they perceived it was inextricable from themselves as people, echoing the 'born this way' LGBTQ+ rights slogan. I relate to this given how long it took me to feel comfortable with my identity through solitary reflection. Deviating from monosexist

norms and expectations has meant that my bisexual/queer identity is central to my experience and sense of self, and therefore it is critical for me to identify by these labels. Clearly the emotional labour conducted in validating oneself means that identity labels are useful when overcoming homophobia and monosexism, and when living one's life.

Although many participants felt an emotional connection to a label, many also perceived that their identity could change and transform over time. The majority of participants had used and discarded various identities in the course of describing their sexuality. From queer, to bi, to pan, to lesbian, to gay, to ace, to demisexual – there was no particular journey notable in plurisexual's stories, beyond the fact that labels were seen as imperfect and linked to particular moments and experiences in someone's lives. Jade-Louisa summarised this best when she described her identity as bisexual, but clarified that her experience of her bisexuality might be more akin to how someone interpreted pansexuality:

> My sexuality is fluid – one day I may have the label pansexual, one day I might be able to openly admit to that, or one day I might be like I'm going to stop explaining this in a way that I don't feel fits anymore
>
> *(Jade-Louisa, 24, Bisexual, Cis woman)*

These questions regarding authenticity are likely related to the stigma and disbelief that plurisexuality is met with. Many participants had explored naming themselves with a variety of different identities up until the point of the interview, and many believed that their identity could plausibly change in the future:

> It's a constant thing. Sometimes I do check in with myself, and I'm like 'are we hetero now?' and my brain goes 'no' and it's like 'cool, glad we had this talk' but yeah – sexuality is a spectrum for me, it's very fluid. I'm in touch with myself to accept that one day it may change. It never has, but it might do
>
> *(Jade-Louisa, 24, Bisexual, Cis woman)*

This openness to the potentiality of change speaks to the difficulty of maintaining a slippery and changing identity such as plurisexuality. Although many participants sometimes questioned their identities or were open to the potentiality of change over the course of their identities, many participants had found strategies of expanding their sense of identity to accommodate the differences

in desire that they may feel over the course of their lifetime. This was either through intensive self-reflection, or through accessing different ranges of materials:

> As soon as you stop thinking of sexuality as either binary or three groups and you think of it more as just a long piece of string, it means that you give yourself room to be more like 'today I'm feeling very gay and that's fine' or to be like 'nah nah I feel very straight'
>
> *(Max, 20, Bisexual, Female/Genderqueer)*

> In my early 20s I discovered Kinsey and discovered there was a scale – 'Aha! Okay! That's a little bit more palatable!' because then you can still say that you prefer guys but there's still another part of you that is valid and just because it's not 50/50 doesn't mean that it's not [real]
>
> *(Jules, 32, Pansexual, Non binary)*

The fluidity of plurisexual identities and labels has been noted in previous research (Amestoy, 2001; Flanders, 2017; Mereish, Katz-Wise and Woulfe, 2017). The fact that participants found these answers themselves, either through research or deep introspection speaks again to the way in which monosexism impacts perspectives of the self. The participants who had reframed their experiences, and reframed the very concepts of gender and sexuality more broadly, had essentially created their own plurisexual ontology and epistemology wherein they trusted in their own thoughts, feelings and desires in opposition to monosexist ontologies. This way of escaping monosexist narratives had allowed them to embrace their identities, and reconsider any feelings of shame or guilt associated with their identities.

Beyond reframing sexuality and gender for their own sense of comfort, many plurisexuals also had to consider how they could negotiate the sharing of their identities with others. In doing so, plurisexuals conducted significant emotional labour to educate others, often battling against ignorance, discrimination, and prejudice. Although changeable, some participants felt that labels were extraordinarily useful in being able to communicate their identities to other people, although many would use different identities for different purposes.

> I use bisexual because it's the easiest form of explaining to people who aren't particularly educated in sexuality […] because trying to explain pansexuality – it's impossible […] and then queer is just too much for some people who aren't part of the LGBT community
>
> *(Max, 20, Bisexual, Female/Genderqueer)*

This inability to fully explain a sexuality to an unfamiliar audience was a topic recurrent throughout almost all of the interviews. Participants felt strongly that, generally speaking, heterosexuals did not understand plurisexual identities whatsoever, with many plurisexuals referencing how their heterosexual friends or family members would regularly forget or misunderstand their identities. Participants felt that with certain people - such as LGBTQ+ people, or heterosexuals who understood gender and sexuality – they were able to describe their identities using a terminology which better reflected their sexuality. Participants reiterated this experience across the sample:

> It's easier for other people to identify me [when I say I'm bisexual as opposed to pansexual] – I know there's this idea that you're not supposed to define yourself according to other people, but it can be very exhausting [bisexuality is] something my grandparents can understand
>
> *(Jade-Louisa, 24, Bisexual, Cis woman)*

The adjustment of language so that others could understand them more easily was a way that plurisexuals minimised some important elements of their sexuality to explain to others. Although plurisexuals felt very connected to their chosen labels, they were aware that monosexism and homophobia prevailed, and consequently people might not understand a more 'niche' sexual identity. As a result, plurisexuals often used more common descriptors like *bisexual* so that people would understand them. The participants who adopted this approach spoke in a more detached way about rejection or discrimination on the basis of their sexual identities. For example, Max spoke about the way in which they approach disclosing their identity.

> I don't want to feel bad because I haven't told you, whereas if I tell you and you react badly, that's on you not me […] which means I can absolve all responsibility for the situation as long as I don't lash out back
>
> *(Max, 20, Bisexual, Female/Genderqueer)*

Max continued discussing the outcomes of having come out to their mother:

> [After coming out my mum has] conveniently forgotten, but now it’s not on me that she doesn’t know. I told her; I made that choice. It’s her choice now not to do anything with that information […] I can’t control her reactions – all I can control is what I tell her
>
> *(Max, 20, Bisexual, Female/Genderqueer)*

Max’s laissez-faire approach to the acceptance of their sexuality was shared by a large swathe of the participants in this study, who had simply come to the conclusion that their identity was precious to them, not a source of shame or guilt, and they were not prepared to take on other people’s negativity regarding their identities. Sometimes this perspective intermeshed with other issues. Jacq – a black British non binary person – had suffered many injustices on the basis of their identity. Previously subject to sexual violence, Jacq had seen coming out as bisexual as a positive reclamation of their bodily pleasure. However, Jacq had subsequently experienced significant levels of racism, sexism, misgendering, ableism, and biphobia:

> I've got loads of targets on my back. For being black, for being fat, for being older and disabled, even as a survivor, and being bisexual - it kind of pulls a lot of them together. And yeah, just, you also just get no peace. No kind of peace or cooperation or anything from other LGT people or white bisexual people or from straight people either. And that's like 99.5% of the population. And just, you know, just doesn't acknowledge or care or are interested in me
>
> *(Jacq, 49, Bisexual, Non binary)*

As a result, Jacq walked away from a variety of communities that they were part of, to maintain their sense of identity and ability to feel positively about their identities. This narrative was common. At points, participants had to walk away from situations, lose connections, or conceal truths about themselves in order to maintain some degree of self-esteem and contentment regarding their identity. Avoiding feelings of guilt, shame, and fear was a process of acknowledging that one had to develop one’s own coping methods to tolerate other people’s rejection of plurisexuality. Participants often developed tools to combat shame, guilt, and fear, in isolation, or through seeking online information, or LGBTQ+ communities to reinforce that their identity was normal and appropriate. This speaks to the way in which communities are typically heteronormative and monosexist and this can impact significantly on the identity and self-worth of plurisexuals.

6.4 Plurisexuals as Sexual Renegades

This chapter has highlighted how an adapted queer theoretical model is critical to a new reading of plurisexuality that can better understand the role of gender, lived experience, intersectionality, and the body in experiences of sexuality. Through viewing categories as important in daily life, but with an overarching suspicion regarding their impact and purpose, this chapter has developed a nuanced approach to understanding labels for plurisexual people. Furthermore, through emphasising the lived experience of holding a label in coming out, in personal experience, and in navigating a sense of community, this chapter has illustrated the necessity of an everyday sociology of sexuality. In brief, a plurisexual identity is extremely important for the people in this study, overall. Labels, internal identification, disclosure, community, and the overarching shadows of monosexism and homophobia impacted participants' day-to-day experiences.

The simultaneous use and problematisation of labels by plurisexuals are indicative of their feelings towards homophobia, biphobia, and monosexism. The majority of people wished for a world without labels, where sexual restrictions were not placed on people on the basis of gender. However, many participants were also aware that that was not a plausible reality given the rampant homophobia, biphobia, and monosexism that they encountered on a daily basis. Given that possessing a label was a way of developing one's self-esteem and finding a community, participants were broadly supportive of the use of labels. However, participants also complicated the way in which labels were used, given that they were only one indicator of a broader sexuality that did not encompass relationship models, sexual styles, and sexual attraction. Although labels were seen as good and bad, many participants had emotional connections to their labels as they were a point of validation, and a symbol of justification amidst the turmoil of homophobia and biphobia.

In coming to terms with an individual identity, monosexism, heteronormativity, and biphobia have implications for feeling comfortable and certain about one's identity. These experiences demonstrate that monosexism and homophobia are strong in society, resulting in a hostility geared towards the binary-busting desires inherent to plurisexuality. Ultimately, plurisexuals had to navigate these hostile social currents alone, turning to the internet for advice, and trusting in their own experiences to be able to coherently describe their sexual identities as plurisexual. In this way, plurisexuals are able to reflexively interpret their desires and phrase them to a high level. Mostly, these identities go against what is desired of them by monosexist normative social currents, both in heterosexual, lesbian, and gay communities.

Many participants felt that having LGBTQ+ friends was important so that they could discuss their same-gender desires with others and feel comfortable doing so. However, participants

highlighted the biphobia and monosexism inherent in the LGBTQ+ community that restrict many people's entry onto the scene, or make people feel uncomfortable about joining in LGBTQ+ communities.

It is apparent that plurisexuals have to conduct significant emotional labour when navigating their identity given that the world is hostile to the concept of plurisexuality. Through reframing their perspectives on sexuality and gender, plurisexuals are able to individually come to terms with their identities, sometimes with the help of the internet or LGBTQ+ connections. However, although plurisexuals are able to move away from guilt, shame, and fear in themselves after a long period of reflection, they are unable to perceive how others will react to their disclosure. Plurisexuals have to educate others, tempering their language and expression to best meet heterosexuals or LGBTQ+ people in the middle to understand one another. As a result, plurisexuals lose some of the nuances of their identity in the communication, so that they can be accepted by others.

These findings highlight the necessity to understand how plurisexuals come to terms with their identities. In brief, this research has demonstrated that there is a chasm between a monosexist ontology (desire means being attracted exclusively to one gender) and a plurisexual ontology (desire means being attracted to people of multiple genders). This chasm can only be resolved by developing a plurisexual epistemology where plurisexuals can understand their sexualities through trusting in their own experiences and desires as opposed to adhering to social norms. Developing this plurisexual epistemology will typically lead to concluding that sexuality and gender need not correlate (especially not in a monosexist way) and therefore a plurisexual ontology is acceptable. If a plurisexual develops this epistemology and ontology, they become what I term a *Sexual Renegade* who is outside of the monosexist social order/ontology. As a *Sexual Renegade*, they are willing to face not only homophobia, but also monosexism in the practice and feeling of their desires for multiple genders. Those who do not develop a plurisexual epistemology are *Sexual Outsiders* (alone, without community, uncertain, shameful). To be clear, I do not suggest that any position in this sexual social dynamic is superior in the way that 'bisexuality as transcendent' scholarship does. These are not value-laden positions. Further, as a *Sexual Renegade,* plurisexuals may still use methods of 'passing' based on their expert knowledge of where appropriate in public spaces where there is an absence of community. This is not to say there is shame in their passing, but rather an understanding of the necessity of integrating safely into a society which is broadly cisheteronormative.

This chapter has contributed to previous work regarding identity management in sexuality and plurisexuality scholarship through demonstrating the nuances in identities and elaborating on the different ways we could conceive of identity beyond our gender interest. This chapter particularly

contributes a new theoretical dimension to understanding the way in which plurisexual people come to understand their sexualities, through suggesting that plurisexual people are *Sexual Renegades* who have necessarily developed a plurisexual ontology that deviates from the monosexist social order. This theoretical suggestion has implications not only for the study of plurisexuality, but also sexuality as a whole. The next chapter will explore further how having a relationship with different genders affects a plurisexual sense of self, particularly in relation to gender.

Chapter 7: Bodies, Futures, and Expectations in Plurisexual Relationships[10]

[10] With thanks to Nikki Hayfield of UWE who had many conversations with me and shared literature with me that shaped the direction of this chapter

7.0 Plurisexuality, Relationships, and Gender

The previous chapter demonstrated the primacy and problematic consequences of monosexism. This social force impacts negatively on a plurisexual sense of identity and selfhood, and navigation of the social world. However, many plurisexuals become *Sexual Renegades*, navigating disclosure and performances of sexual identity at different times through showing, hiding, telling, and passing to maintain a safe and happy life. However, this chapter seeks to explore these navigations in the context of romantic and sexual relationships with others. Given that plurisexuals interact with multiple genders in the course of their romantic and sexual lives, it is important to understand how plurisexuals experience changes across differently gendered partners to highlight the navigation of gender and sexuality more broadly. In essence, gendered relationships shape the plurisexual experience, and a partner's gender has wide ranging impacts on a plurisexual's social life and imagined future.

As discussed in Chapter 3, a small body of sociological feminist research has demonstrated that plurisexuals replicate or experience gender norms in their relationships (Pennington, 2009; Lynch and Maree, 2017; Daly, King and Yeadon-Lee, 2018). In particular, Pennington's work relates to the following chapter given Pennington's focus on romantic relationships. Pennington argued that gender was an organising structure within plurisexual relationships, regardless of the fact that plurisexuals desire outside of gender norms (2009). Pennington's commentary regarding plurisexuals' management of gender dynamics in relationships forms the basic theoretical grounding for this chapter. However, this chapter expands on Pennington's work in many ways. Firstly, Pennington's work was conducted in 2009, prior to marriage equality and the opening up of heteronormative models of relationships to same-gender couples. Additionally, Pennington's sample was composed of bisexual people whose median age was 21, whereas this study has a participant median age of 29 and average age of 31. Finally, Pennington's sample of 20 participants included only one participant who was not cis, whereas this study includes 9 trans, non binary, or gender non-conforming participants. The research in this chapter builds on Pennington's conclusions through incorporating a more diverse sample that, 10 years later, has access to many more forms of legal equality that could impact upon the dynamic of a relationship. This is significant in understanding how external social forces of homonormativity and legal equality may have affected the way in which relationships are carried out for plurisexuals.

Relying on concepts such as cisnormativity, monosexism, bigenderism and gender expression, this chapter explores the way in which gender affects plurisexual relationships. This has been broken down into two salient themes based on the interview data; (i) seeking pleasure/performing desire,

and (ii) expectations in gendered relationships. This chapter concludes by theorising the role of gender in plurisexual relationships, which are significantly impacted by cisheteronormativity.

In essence, this chapter demonstrates that the gender of a plurisexual's partner(s) greatly affects the relationship(s). Sex, behavior, self-esteem, and conceptions of the future are all influenced by the presence or absence of specific gender dynamics in a relationship. Where heteronormative or homonormative scripts apply in a relationship, participants were more likely to feel confined by social expectations. This resulted in participants navigating social structures of gender and sexuality through carefully balancing social and structural expectations of a gender pairing, and their own agency in how they wanted to perform their genders.

These findings theoretically contribute to the study of plurisexual relationships firstly by adopting a sociological approach which is important when studying plurisexuality and relationships as discussed in Chapter 1. Secondly, these findings explore the dynamics for people of multiple genders, as research into this area has been primarily concerned with women's experiences of relationships – through a more diverse sample, it is possible to develop more nuanced conclusions about the impact of gender in relationships. Thirdly, these findings explore plurisexuals' *interpretations* of relationships (as opposed to relationship *realities*) thus enabling an understanding of how plurisexuals orient and understand their relationships in a monosexist social dynamic.

7.1 Embodied Sexualities: Seeking Pleasure, Performing Desirability

Lee's Story

Lee is a 27-year-old bisexual man. He is friendly, intelligent, and funny. Our interview was long and intense, as Lee and I found many similarities in our experience. At points, I felt that Lee was experiencing catharsis by sharing his experiences, whilst also hoping to find someone else who related to what he was saying so that he could feel a little more confident in his bisexuality. Lee's story resonated significantly with other participants' experiences of sex in relation to the gender of their partner.

Lee had one girlfriend with whom he was sexually active before coming out as gay. He did not have a supportive response to his disclosure and had to accommodate his parents' response to his sexuality by not openly discussing it with other family members. When Lee went to university, he began to have sex with other men, and entered into a long-term relationship with a man. After a number of years of dating his boyfriend, they broke up, and Lee realised that he found women sexually attractive, and began to identify as bisexual which he described as 'a second revelation – in biblical terms now – a double revelation.' However, although now identifying as bisexual – not openly to

everyone in his life – Lee was experiencing a great deal of internal conflict regarding his identity and attraction.

Lee had had significantly more sexual experience with men than with women. He described his internal anxiety in this way:

> If I were to ever go on a date with a woman in the near future and we were getting on and it got to a point where sexual contact was likely, I would go [into] hypersensitive and hyperaware mode and it would probably kill any desire […] Am I not just 'safer' being with another guy? […] I'm not as used to vagina as I am to penises […] the prospect of having sexual contact with a woman – I would find it difficult to become aroused at first […] but with men, it's instant.

Lee half-jokingly described his relationship with the vagina as being one of 'dread' at points in our conversation. He felt a lot of anxiety about the difficulty of having to perform adequately in a sexual sense if with a woman. This was related to fears around a lack of experience, but also related to comments from his parents, which included his mother asking, 'how would you explain to a future wife that you've had previous male [partners]?' Lee's feelings around sexuality and gender also connected with concerns over his physical appearance, as he disclosed to me that he had a poor sense of body image, and referred to the 'holy trinity of being in a gay relationship – muscles, penis, abs.' Lee felt this pressure to have an ideal body when looking for men to partner with, however, he said that his female friends had told him that women were not as physically oriented, saying 'it doesn't matter if you've got a dadbod […] it's personality, it's the fun factor, all the rest of it that counts.'

Lee felt that there were differences between what different genders were seeking. Lee also felt the pressure to perform differently in a sexual capacity based on the gender of his partner. As a result of early and more sustained experiences with other men, Lee was in a position where – at 27 – he did not feel that he had significant experiences with women, and consequently dreaded the potential beginning of a relationship with a woman due to his lack of experience of vaginas.

In light of Lee's experiences, this theme explores the way that plurisexuals conceptualise sex with different genders. Overall, plurisexuals view sex with different genders as an experience that can breed anxiety in the early forays of sexual exploration with different genders. How plurisexuals related to their own gender identity in the course of sexual exploration changed. Heteronormative and cisnormative dynamics meant that sex took on different meanings for people. Demisexuals, BAME people, and polyamorous people also had specific relationships with sex and bodies that are illustrated

briefly throughout this section. This section illustrates how relationships are not divorced from cisheteronormative practices and roles, even where participants are having sex with multiple genders.

Physical Pleasure: What's Sex All About?

Most of the participants in this study were sexually interested and active, although a few identified as demisexual or asexual. Most of the sexual participants were sexually active, although a few had not had sex with anyone before we spoke. Those who were (or had been) engaged in sexual relationships held strong opinions on what it meant to be sexual in a plurisexual context. For most, sex was seen as a pleasurable and enjoyable experience with a partner or partners. However, many people felt that there were differences in their experiences of sex with certain genders. Some participants held a distinct preference for one gender over another:

> Lesbian sex is better than straight sex, it just is (laughs) it just is, I can't help it
>
> *(Amy, 29, Lesbian, Woman)*

Similar to Amy, some participants had a distinct sexual preference for one gender over another. For some, this preference changed over time:

> Some [plurisexual] people go through [the 'bi cycle' over] the course of a year [where your gender preference shifts over time] Maybe in the summer lots of men walking around with no top on and you're distracted by their chest […] over the course of the years I can put a longer curve […] in attractions
>
> *(Jessie, 44, Bisexual, Female/Genderqueer/Enby)*

For Jessie, her attraction could shift entirely over the course of a few years. Other participants discussed similar feelings regarding gender, but most saw sex with particular genders as important for different purposes overall:

> I find women attractive, but I like sex with men. I don't find men attractive though, it's just for the sex
>
> *(Dave, 57, Bisexual, Male)*

> If I want to have sex tomorrow, it's much easier to get it with guys
>
> *(Rishabh, 22, Bisexual, Male)*

> Sex is different [with a woman] and you have to be much more connected and intimate. It's so much easier to have sex with a man and just check out
>
> *(Abha, 30, Sexual, Cis female)*

Overall, amongst the participants, people felt that it was much easier to pick up and have sex with men than with women. People felt that men were far more sexually inclined, and far more likely to be interested in a transitory sexual connection, whereas participants depicted women as requiring more romance and sustained interest to seduce. Consequently, many participants discussed how, if they just wanted to have sex, they would often seek to connect with men. Participants often depicted sex with women as a far more emotional and romantic experience, which required a level of connection beyond the physical. These dynamics have been documented in Holland's study around (hetero)sexuality, where women's experiences were markedly different from men's experiences, as women's vulnerability in a patriarchal sexual landscape posits them as vulnerable to a dominant male sexuality that disempowers women through offering emotionless sex, expectations around ideal feminine bodies, and sexual coercion (including pressuring women into the absence of contraceptives such as condoms) (Holland *et al.*, 1998). Although many women felt that engaging in sex and romance with men entailed a series of power dynamics, broadly speaking, most women were extremely sex positive, centring their own desires and pleasures when having sex with men:

> I really enjoy sexual pleasure, and I really enjoy connecting with people intimately, however casual it may or may not be […] I've often felt [this part of me] is at odds with mainstream messaging. I always really really enjoyed sex, even though I've had my share of unhappy experiences. I've always just wanted to connect with someone – whoever it may be – at a very intimate level and on a physical as well as emotional level
>
> *(Abha, 30, Sexual, Cis female)*

Although Abha referred to her 'unhappy experiences', hinting at sexual dynamics that may have reinforced a coercive and male dominated heterosexuality, it is important to note that her sex positivity and desire to satiate her own desires outside of dominant mainstream messaging around

women's purity is intact. Her thoughts were reflected in the responses of other participants, particularly women, who felt sex was empowering, fun, and individual – regardless of the fact that most recognised it fell in with a sexual culture that attempted to police people's sexualities, noted by Abha's reference to 'mainstream messaging'. These developments in sex positivity, and the willingness to centre one's own desire for some AFAB people, suggests that the dynamics Holland wrote about may be less salient or oppressive for plurisexuals two decades later.

Outside of the purposes of sex, and why people chose to have sex with certain genders, many participants referred to differences in the physical experience of having sex with different genders. I interviewed Stan in a bustling café, where it became inconveniently quiet the moment we discussed his sexual preferences. He quietly discussed his enjoyment of being penetrated by other people, which he had first encountered in relationships with men. In discussing how he felt about penetration in the context of sex with women, he said:

> I felt like a whole load of shame […] about liking being penetrated […] that was really difficult to deal with in a relationship with a girl, because that feels like something you have to admit whereas in another context it's not something I have to be like 'well, by the way'
>
> *(Stan, 26, Queer/Bisexual, Cis man)*

It was apparent throughout the interviews that participants explored sex differently with different partners. Although ultimately penetration, oral sex, and other acts could be enjoyed regardless of the gender of the sex partner, sometimes these acts would require a level of discussion or admission prior to happening, whereas with partners of other genders, certain sex acts were expected and normalised. In Stan's case, being penetrated was an easy conversation to have with men but required a complex navigation when he spoke about it with women. For some participants, the different sex acts possible based on the configuration of bodies offered different pleasures for different people. Many participants discussed the transformative experience of their first time exploring a different gender than they were used to in a sexual context. For some this experience confirmed their plurisexuality:

> Experiencing (non binary partner) as a woman in feminine clothing, in breastforms, and presenting as a feminine person, very definitely attracted to her. And also incredibly to them as a body with breasts and a penis - somehow it just really works? So now that I've experienced that, no doubt at all that I am not straight
>
> *(Jules, 32, Pansexual, Non binary)*

Similar to Jules, many participants felt that their first time having sex with someone of a different gender was incredibly affirming for their understandings of themselves as plurisexual. The confirmation that they were attracted to someone of a different gender made many people feel more confident in their identities, which for most was incredibly important in the monosexist climate in which they were developing their sexual identities.

Many participants discussed toying with the limitations and boundaries of gender in a sexual context. Participants referred to the way in which they would imagine themselves as different genders or having different body parts to pleasure their partners in different ways. This was often dependent on which gender the participant was having sex with at the time. The notion of switching genders or gender roles with different partners emerged often in conversations around sex:

> I love dick, I'm not going to lie, I love it. I do get penis envy, sometimes I just really want to have a dick and really want to put it in a woman
>
> *(Abha, 30, Sexual, Cis female)*

The way in which participants such as Abha, Stan, and Jules spoke about gender flipping, anxiety, and sex acts with different genders led me to question whether it is less about the physical bodies of different people, but rather about the different power dynamics between genders. Sex anxiety was often clearly related to a lack of experience with penises or vaginas, but sometimes there was more anxiety related to sex due to homophobia and biphobia. In relation to the switching of genders, or the desire to 'fuck' someone in different ways, I query whether this is something related to power play and the primacy of the phallus in contemporary society. Similarly, Stan's shame around the act of being penetrated falls in line with the social construction of masculinity that suggests that men must be (hetero)sexually active as form of masculinity (Jackson, 2009). Furthermore, masculinity is defined in many ways by its homophobia, in that masculinity is regarded as a flight from femininity that in itself is conflated with gay identities and desires (Kimmel, 2009). Participants' experiences of having sex with multiple genders and considering their sex acts and bodies differently in these contexts are demonstrative of the fact that sex acts between different genders need to be recoded so as not to fall into 'feminine' and 'masculine' roles. As Butler writes:

> Sexual practices […] will invariably be experienced differently depending on the relations of gender in which they occur. And there may be forms of "gender" within homosexuality

> which call for a theorization that moves beyond categories of “masculine” and “feminine.” If we seek to privilege sexual practice as a way of transcending gender, we might ask, at what cost is the analytic separability of the two domains taken to be distinction in fact? (Butler, 1993, p. 27)

This question bears consideration in light of the participant interviews whereby gender and sexuality intermingled in ways that suggest a new consideration of sex acts and sexuality are required. Although participants tended to describe their sexual contact in the context of femininity and masculinity, alluding to what ‘real’ men and women did, it is clear that these narratives did not fit their experiences, desires, and pleasures.

Demisexual participants also had a different experience of relating to other bodies. Only two people identified as demisexual within the sample, but it is worth noting their unique experiences of body politics:

> I don't feel attraction to people unless I have an emotional response to them […] but as an extension of that, pretty much anyone I have an emotional connection to I wouldn't kick them out of bed […] Gender doesn't really feature in my world that much and nor does physical attraction or physical appearance
>
> *(Sarah, 30, Bisexual/Pansexual, Cis female)*

> Being demisexual means that I only experience sexual attraction within the context of a romantic relationship or after I have grown to know and trust somebody […] I don't feel sexual attraction to a person that I just met […] And then I've been, I feel romantically attached to both men and women
>
> *(Jana, 26, Biromantic Demisexual, Woman)*

The demisexual experience is indicative of the way in which bodies have different meanings for different people, and how the narrow confines of how we portray bodies, often in gendered ways, often with certain power dynamics, and often with expectations of how they will behave and groom themselves, do not fit for every person’s experience.

Physical Desirability: Feeling Yourself, Doing Your Thing

Beyond the act of having sex, many participants spoke about how they could feel desirable in of themselves in different ways with different partners. For some, this was a case of knowing how to appeal to certain genders:

> I know how to be with my body with a man […] I know how to make myself sexy to a man
>
> *(Abha, 30, Sexual, Cis female)*

Abha's implications were that she did not know quite how to do that with women confidently at the point of the interview. Participants noted concerns around initial experiences with different genders throughout the study, with many participants speaking about their initial anxieties in engaging with other genders. For some this was tied up with the fear of engaging with their same gender in a homophobic society, but for others who had previously explored same gender sex acts and were exploring different gender experiences, it was linked with an anxiety over performance and an uncertainty over expectations. The gendered body held a lot of power over how participants approached sex acts, with possible additional implications of internalised homophobia or biphobia restricting participants from pursuing some sex acts. Similarly, participants were sometimes conflicted in how to engage with different genders, as heteronormativity and homophobia precluded an easy flirtation with multiple genders:

> Women […] tend to be a lot more [tactile], we hug more easily, it's easier to make physical contact with them. With guys, I'm constantly conscious of the fact that I don't want things to be taken the wrong way unless I'm sure […] I find myself being a lot more restrained around men than I am with women
>
> *(Jana, 26, Biromantic Demisexual, Woman)*

These different expectations played out in multiple ways for different participants, with some finding it easier to be with particular genders based on the heteronormative expectations, and others – as in Jana's case – restraining their behaviour somewhat for fear of appearing too sexually invested in certain genders.

The limitations of gender, femininity and masculinity were highlighted consistently by all participants. Beyond the confusion over whether or not sex acts could be appropriate with certain genders, participants were concerned about how their desires and acts could reflect their own gender identities and sense of self and desirability. These questions were unpicked slightly by one participant, Abha:

> I've asked myself as well in a situation where I'm attracted to women or having sex with a woman, am I feeling like I want to be a man being with that woman? Or am I feeling like I'm a woman being with a woman? And I'm quite a dominant person and I feel like when I'm with a woman I often assume a more dominant role, and we're always told that dominant equals masculine
>
> *(Abha, 30, Sexual, Cis female)*

Abha's quote is indicative of the way in which same-gender sexual attraction or sex acts can be seen as 'betraying' one's gender identity. In essence, "what confirms masculinity is being (hetero)sexually active; what confirms femininity is being sexually attractive to men" (Jackson, 2009, p.30). For a few of the cis women participants in this study, their same-gender attraction was often connected to their feeling that they were not adequate examples of womanhood, and this often created conflicted gender explorations, gender desires, and sexual exploits, as in the case of Abha. This heteronormative and cisnormative social dynamic often affected plurisexuals' perceptions of themselves and their desirability. A number of the participants stated an overall romantic or sexual preference for people who were not cis men, or at least alluded to ways in which it was easier to be romantic partners with non cis men. Although these perceptions are not necessarily true, with many examples of cis women being sexually driven (Walker, 2014), participants reiterated the belief that cis women in particular were more emotionally and romantically available. These findings link to the role of masculinity in society, where, in a patriarchal society, and in a society where hegemonic masculinity and toxic masculinity often take a central role, partnering with cis men, whether heterosexual or gay, can be a difficult undertaking for plurisexual participants due to the way masculinity is constructed as aggressive and sexual (Connell, 1995; Kimmel, 2009). Cis men in this study spoke about the difficulties of building relationships with other men due to the preference for sex over romance in communities of men who have sex with men:

> I guess in a way though my relationships with men have been more […] my first experiences with guys was much different from the experiences I was used to with women because I felt quite a lot of weird sexual pressure that I hadn't felt with women.
>
> *(Stan, 26, Queer/Bisexual, Cis man)*

Cis women spoke about levels of vulnerability they had to adopt in dating cis men:

> I found it always much harder to embrace femininity when being with men because you always feel that it might make you vulnerable […] it's so easy to fall into patterns and practices that I really don't like and I always felt that I needed to constantly make a point really, but I found it quite exhausting.
>
> *(Elizabeth, 45, Undefined, Woman)*

For most cis women who discussed similar feelings around cis men, this related to the dominance of masculinity and the expectations of gender roles when dating or having sex with a man.

Trans and non binary experiences of sex and the body varied slightly from cis narratives. Many participants had complicated relationships with the way in which their bodies were received by others. Jessie spoke about how, as a trans woman/genderqueer person, people assumed she would not have sex with anyone:

> I guess one of the things with being gender queer and being bi is that an awful lot of stuff is wrapped up in people's gender expectations of you that - to be a little facetious - the 'oh you have sex with people?' is there as well
>
> *(Jessie, 44, Bisexual, Female/Genderqueer/Enby)*

Jessie's experience speaks to common issues around the perceived sexuality of trans and non binary people. Media representation of trans people show them as hypersexual (Serano, 2007), or as engaging in sex-work and therefore undesirable (Pfeffer, 2014). The sexual construction of trans people is often stigmatising or negative (Pfeffer, 2014). Tompkins' research found perceptions that people who dated trans people received negative responses, such as being labelled 'tranny-chaser' and assumed to have a fetish for trans people (Tompkins, 2014). Although - in keeping with transphobia and cisnormativity – trans people's sexualities remains controversial, an increasing number of activist and literary texts for trans people and their partners are being published to provide a positive representation of trans sexualities (See for example: O'Keefe and Fox, 2008; Diamond, 2011; Roche, 2018). For those who were not cis, it was important to be understood in one's gender. Sex had the potential of being very affirming for one's gender identity. By being seen as desirable, participants felt validated in their gender expression:

> There is a degree of also a bit of validation with my gender [when men are attracted to me] […] there's also a degree of validating myself as someone with a feminine side as a whole to be attractive in a feminine way. And likewise, for women I would also like to

> attract - I guess it would be mostly restricted to either bisexual or lesbian women [that] would also be a bit of a validation in some ways
>
> *(Bern, 36, Pansexual, Genderfluid/Non binary)*

The way in which sex and relationships can act as microaffirmations for people who are trans and non binary has been noted as important by psychologists with an interest in relational dynamics (Galupo *et al.*, 2018; Pulice-Farrow, Bravo and Galupo, 2019). Although sex could be a deeply affirming process for many people's sense of gender and sense of identity, others could find it difficult for a variety of reasons. Jacq's experiences of racism in various communities related to the way in which their black body was perceived by others in a kink and polyamorous dynamic. Due to the way in which their body was understood, Jacq ended up leaving the sexual communities that they were part of:

> The kink communities, the ignorance and erasure but only when they want it to be - I could put myself up as an Amazonian goddess online and then yeah, everything would be great, well, things would be a helluva lot better, but being a switch who is mostly subby and doesn't live in the US and who's black, then nah never get any kind of interaction and if I do it's highly highly inappropriate, people sort of saying - oh gosh - I know there was a 'hi chocolate' as a line, but there'd be others - the 'n' word was all over the place. And meeting - just like with the polyam stuff - meeting other black people who were into that, unless you're in America just forget it
>
> *(Jacq, 49, Bisexual, Non binary)*

The inappropriate responses to Jacq's body, and the expectations laid on the black body show that sex and bodies as extremely political and socially laden aspects of our sexual experiences. The sexed and gendered body is also racialised with significant implications for those who are not white - for example - black women are seen as hypersexual and exotic, whilst black men are seen as aggressive and dominating (Nagel, 2003; Collins, 2006). Further, Jacq discussed advertising themselves as an 'Amazonian goddess' to fit in with raced expectations of their body, regardless of the fact that they are non binary. Jacq's experience further highlights not only cisnormative and heteronormative dynamics, but also racism and the implications of all of this. An Amazonian goddess brings to mind a dominant woman, aggressive, who is close to nature. In a sexual dynamic this would suggest a woman who would dominate her partner, with little emotion, and who would stand strong over him/her/them. These images are racialised, and are indicative of a wider social trend of criticising and policing black women's bodies as simultaneously erotic and grotesque (Weitz and Gordon, 1993; McKay and Johnson, 2008). As Woodard and Mastin write, black women are often depicted as a mammy, a matriarch, a sexual siren, or a welfare mother/queen – in this case, playing into the

Amazonian Goddess trope connects the image of a sexual siren with that of nature and a base sensuality (Woodard and Mastin, 2005).

Undoubtedly, bodies are political, and the social messaging of how we can engage with one another sexually or romantically based on the body is extensive. Plurisexuals navigate these dynamics in different ways with different genders. Interestingly, plurisexuals are intensely aware of the different approaches to bodies in that they accommodate social understandings of appropriate sex acts with different bodies, and the different sexual scripts that one must adopt when engaging with different bodies. This can cause anxiety in initial sexual encounters with different genders, but ultimately results in an affirmation of one's body and a willingness to explore sexual boundaries with different genders. Although plurisexuals can understand what they themselves may like sexually after being exposed to different sex acts across different genders, the majority of plurisexuals saw sex with different genders as having different outcomes, where sexual connections with men were often seen as easily achievable, and sexual encounters with women were seen as requiring more romantic and emotional attachment.

7.2 Following the Script, Doing the Dance: Expectations in Gendered Relationships

Gina's Story

Gina is a warm and hilarious 24-year-old cis woman. We did not talk in person, but rather spoke via video call. Although I was initially afraid that this would diminish our rapport, within the first five minutes of talking to her, I realised that this wasn't going to be the outcome. Gina's effusive confidence translated through the video call to result in a very enjoyable and humorous conversation.

At the point of the interview, Gina was in a relationship with a cis heterosexual man who she had been dating for 3 years. Gina had not dated any women or other genders at this point in time. She realised that she was bisexual when she had a threesome with a man and a woman. In the course if it, she said that the man had been directing a lot of the action, but she had thought to herself that she would be entirely comfortable having the threesome with two other women and no men. They later repeated the threesome a few months later. A short time after these experiences, Gina came out as bisexual to herself and some friends and felt comfortable about the possibilities of dating women. However, at this point, an opportunity presented itself to pursue her current boyfriend which she described in the following way:

> He was moving away to (city) for a year and it was kind of 'well it's now or never, better make my move now,' so there was a lot of weighing up between do I stay single and explore all these wasted years? Or do I go for this guy?

In the course of their relationship, they were sometimes in long distance configurations. In one of these times, Gina's boyfriend told her that he would be happy for her to go and have sex with other women. In describing this dynamic, Gina said the following:

> I really thought it shows how much he loves me, that he was willing for me to kind of learn more about myself and go find out about myself in something that for a lot of people would be an absolute betrayal […] if I'd gone and shagged a man then that would definitely have been cheating. It was literally only because he is a man, it's totally different

The way in which Gina and her boyfriend constructed having sex with a woman as inherently different from having sex with a man speaks to the division between gender in relationships, and the way in which the romantic scripts between different gender compositions are seen as very different, to the point that Gina having sex with another woman was acceptable in the eyes of her boyfriend, contrary to his reaction to the prospect of her having sex with a man. Gina did not end up having sex with any women during this time, and to this day has not had any individual experiences with other women. As a result, in the course of the interviews, Gina asked me a number of questions about dating other women. She wanted to know how I flirted with women, how I met other women, and how I advertised my own sexuality to women. Researchers are often seen as an expert in their own fields and asked for advice (Oakley, 1981; Hubbard, Backett-Milburn and Kemmer, 2001), and in this context I felt very conflicted as to whether or not I should give her advice as a friend – as Oakley may have suggested. For the most part, I chose to answer briefly, factually, and vaguely, attempting to redirect the conversation by saying that I had the same questions about attracting men.

What struck me in the course of our conversation, was the fact that to date different genders required an entirely different set of skills, based on knowing communication styles, cultural touchstones, and an awareness of the clues that might point to someone's sexual interests. Gina's experiences and questions in the course of the interviews pointed to the fact that some people felt able to learn these skills across genders, but others were not able to on the basis of their romantic experiences. This section explores the way in which participants navigated homonormative and heteronormative scripts based on the gender of their partners or who they were attracted to. In brief, gender plays a significant role in how relationships develop due to gender expectations, heteronormativity, and homonormativity.

Experiences of Homo/Heteronormativity

Beyond navigating the body of another participant successfully, plurisexuals also had to learn how to navigate the complex social dynamics of different genders. Participants recognised that there were particular gender roles that they were supposed to adopt when in a relationship:

> [In] male and female relationships, there's this tendency for everyone to sort of fall into their accepted roles
>
> *(Jade-Louisa, 24, Bisexual, Cis woman)*

> When the two of you are different genders, there's so much social politics that goes into these things […] and there's that whole yin and yang
>
> *(Gillian, 29, Bisexual, Woman)*

Participants referred to the way in which the social heteronormative script was suggestive of men and women completing one another in some way. Participants spoke about the relationship between men and women, as depicted in the media, culture, and socially, as being a relatively forceful imposition of roles, where men were more active and directive, and women were passive and emotionally supportive. Alongside these emotional balances, this was often connected in society to tasks completed in the context of a relationship, where, for example, women are far more responsible for domestic chores and childcare than men in the context of shared living (Windebank, 2001). The way in which participants spoke about these expectations demonstrated that they viewed these as external expectations that dictated how one would approach a romantic or sexual relationship with another person. Participants generally recognised that these differences were a result of socialisation:

> If you've always been perceived as female […] people treat you differently on a day to day basis. They have different expectations of you since you were like 5. So naturally you're going to react differently to different things because of what people have taught you to do. Whereas for men […] if you're really really masculine […] certain things have been expected of you since you were 12 so you're probably less likely to cry and things like that
>
> *(Max, 20, Bisexual, Female/Genderqueer)*

As a result of the recognition of the different social roles caused through environmental influences, many participants spoke about how they adapted their behavior in relationships with different

genders. Different things which were affected amongst participants included style of flirtation, overall behavior, power balances, considerations of the future, and emotional labour:

> With a man maybe I would a bit more compelled to fit traditional feminine roles […] I would want to be the smaller one, the one that needs protecting, that sort of thing. […] If I were with a woman you could almost sort of trade off those things - I'll be the one who can drive, and you can be the one who isn't afraid of spiders or whatever because it's not going to be me
>
> *(Gillian, 29, Bisexual, Woman)*

Importantly, these gender roles and expectations within a relationship were primarily discussed in the context of a differently-gendered pairing. Where there was a man and a woman, participants felt far more compelled to fall into a gender role based on the narrative of heteronormative relationships. Having learned the script of who they were supposed to be from a young age, participants often were affected by these expectations in relationships. However, when in a same-gender pairing, participants discussed a level of freedom to divide expectations in a relationship amongst themselves:

> With women because you don't have [relationship and gender] expectations from one to the other […] it all just kind of comes a bit more irrelevant. So, you kind of go 'well if I want to be the more masculine or more protective or whatever then I can do that, or [if?] I can't, I don't have to' […] it feels easier to choose what kind of thing you want to be in a relationship [if] you're in a same-sex relationship
>
> *(Isabelle, 24, Bisexual, Female)*

Participants regularly discussed how in same gender relationships they were able to develop a script and relationship format that was immediately easier than entering into relationships where gender expectations and heteronormativity were present. Tabatabai and Linders conducted research into US-based women entering into a relationship with someone of a gender they had not previously paired with. Their work has demonstrated how women felt that being in relationships with men brought their romantic lives more into an institutional setting "where their hetero-pairing […] automatically triggered heteronormative expectations" (Tabatabai & Linders 2011, p.597). That is, women in Tabatabai and Linders study felt obligated to follow certain heteronormative relationship patterns in their pairings. This PhD found that women and AFAB people were aware of these potential dynamics and chose to push against them in various ways. One way of doing so was through seeking relationships with other women:

> I don't want to end up in a situation where I'm explaining feminism to a boyfriend or dealing with that. If I meet a man I'm interested in, great, but if I'm going on dating apps then I'm going to be filtering them out
>
> *(Simone, 24, Bisexual, Cis woman)*

Many women discussed how being with other women allowed them to connect on multiple levels in an egalitarian way. Women participants discussed shared understandings of gender, oppression, feminism, and queerness as relatable points in a same-gender relationship. Some non binary people also looked for relationships with women because they believed women would be more emotionally warm:

> I feel that interacting with men, there is always a […] bit of competition going on, that one man needs to feel a certain status with the other person, and it's a lot of the bonding experience that happens between men. And for there to be a bit of a romantic connection, this has to be sort of pierced in a way, there needs to be this vulnerability […] I feel it's more difficult for me to let it happen. And I just generally gravitate - I tend to aesthetically and just generally more attending to femininity
>
> *(Bern, 36, Pansexual, Genderfluid/Non binary)*

Other non binary people sought relationships with men – there was not a clear preference or direction for non binary people, rather, they sought someone who would respect and affirm their gender, regardless of the gender of their partner. Men had a more complicated picture of the people they wished to date. As the previous section showed, men were often more accessible for casual sex, which led some men to pursue other men as they did not wish to enter into romantic relationships. Furthermore, being in a same-gender relationship could offer a way out of patriarchal and heteronormative scripts:

> I feel more able to have a male partner than a female partner because I'm less equipped to deal with societal baggage
>
> *(Lee, 27, Bisexual, Male)*

Lee discussed the gendered expectations of himself as a protector, a breadwinner, a family leader when dating women, making him feel that he preferred dating men at the time of the interview as he could escape the pressure of those narratives based on the ‘societal baggage’ he mentioned. Other

men had similar preferences. However, some men did prefer pursuing women as they were more emotionally and romantically available in some people's views. Broadly, men and non binary people did not have a clear gender preference in opposition to the women in this particular sample.

Many participants positioned themselves in stark opposition to anything that was expected of them in a heteronormative relationship to make a point that gender did not define their interactions:

> If I start having a romantic relationship with a guy [...] I will get super prickly about how I behave [...] I will pay for the bill, I will do it, like, taking that position of 'no no no, I'm not going to be submissive, I'm not going to be paid for, I will decide what we do' [...] with people who aren't cis men I've been more like able to be myself and a bit more open
>
> *(Alice, 32, Bisexual/Queer, Cis woman)*

This dynamic was common amongst women, and less common amongst men and non binary people. Although many participants played into this dynamic of attempting to disturb the gender dynamics and expectations within relationships, participants were generally aware that these dynamics were as a result of learned social behaviour, as opposed to an innate womanhood or manhood that determined roles:

> It's mostly roles that people have been brought up with [...] I avoided a lot of relationships with cis men because they were brought up with a lot of entitlement
>
> *(Carys, 34, Bisexual, Female)*

Carys had transformed her perspective to enter into more sexual relationships with men in the course of her 30s as she felt she could navigate the social roles better. Many other participants developed their perspectives on gender in similar ways, actively refusing to take the roles that they felt society pushed on them. This affected the way in which participants' relationships came together, as those who were in differently gendered relationships spoke about how their relationships depended on a navigation of responsibilities and care for one another that was no longer related to gender:

> (current partner) […] looks completely masculine and acts it around new people, but when it's just me and him I would never describe him as feminine, but he's quite soft. And I think I'm definitely in charge (laughs) […] I think it's more about personality [than gender]
>
> *(Kaden, 23, Bisexual, Non binary)*

The participants who were in relationships regularly referred to how their relationships transcended gender roles in this way, suggesting that this was an important aspect of being in a differently gendered relationship with someone. Those who were partnered at the time of the interviews often made a point of celebrating how their partners did not adhere to stereotypical gender roles, which would have impacted their relationship. Although this was the case for many participants in relationships, the fact remains that in initial interactions with people of different genders, people adopted different gendered approaches to their flirtation and attraction:

> I'm finding that I think I behave slightly differently whether I'm dating a man or a woman. I think there's still certain things that I do that are more traditionally girly especially when you're first dating [a man]. I think I'd be more inclined to do things that might be slightly girly with a man than with a woman
>
> *(Isabelle, 24, Bisexual, Female)*

The majority of participants echoed Isabelle’s initial gendered behaviour. For some, these roles continued, but for those who were in long lasting differently gendered relationships, the prescribed gender roles had fallen away.

A large impact of navigating homonormative, heteronormative and cisnormative scripts was how people outside of the relationship viewed the participants’ romantic or sexual entanglements. It was clear throughout the interviews that a lot of participants felt a lot of pressure to perform in certain ways in public spaces. Many participants stressed their discomfort with being perceived as heterosexual if they were in public in a differently gendered relationship:

> When I was 23 I had had another relationship with a guy but I felt really anxious being in that relationship and walking down the street with him and people assuming I was straight, so that was a huge thing for me, and I felt like I had given up some part of my identity as being gay or lesbian because I was in this relationship and I was struggling to find how do I connect with that side of me by being in a committed relationship but also acknowledging it?
>
> *(Amy, 29, Lesbian, Woman)*

Although we could assume that Amy's identification as a lesbian was *particularly* troubled by this public performance of romance, it was still a common thread amongst other plurisexual identifying participants. Participants regularly referred to how the gender of their partner affected the interpretation of their sexual identities:

> Because I've generally been seen, known, to be with women, I think everybody assumes I'm straight
>
> *(Bern, 36, Pansexual, Genderfluid/Non binary)*

Bern's experience was of benefit to them as they were not publicly out. However, once again, the assumptions of sexual identity based on one's partner's gender speaks to the monosexism rife within culture and social interactions and is indicative of a wider problem of how to perform plurisexuality and be recognised as plurisexual. The same concerns were present for those in same gender relationships, however, there was an additional factor of having to experience homophobia when being seen in public with one's partner:

> If I was in a relationship with someone who was presenting as a man and going into a […] a new environment or place that I wasn't familiar with and didn't know the people there, then that would certainly put a consideration on how you'd act with your partner, whether or not you were likely to get any grief for the simple fact that you were in a relationship with someone that presented as the same gender as you
>
> *(Mike, 36, Bi+, Male)*

This concern is unfortunate and indicative of the homophobia that is rife in public, which often leads same gender couples to conceal their relationship in public for fear of social reprisal, harassment, or aggression.

It is apparent that gender deeply impacts the navigation of social situations, whether this is being seen in public with a partner, or whether this is the flirtation and sense of attraction that develops for a person of a specific gender. In hearing these stories and experiences of the participants, I was somewhat comforted by the fact that I had similar experiences to the participants, and also saddened by the fact that gender roles play such an integral part in forming a relationship. Having previously adopted a more meek presence for men, a more suave presence for women and non binary people, and performed my relationships differently in public, I had hoped that this was something that

was personal to me, and not a behaviour that was replicated and consequently indicative of the insidious nature of gender roles, the gender binary, cisnormativity, heteronormativity, and homonormativity. Seemingly, although participants may have a sexual or romantic attraction to multiple genders, this attraction, communication, and flirtation have to be expressed in different forms based on the gender of one's partner due to the heavily gendered expectations in society. Plurisexuals may be open to sexual or romantic sexual partners regardless of gender, but ultimately plurisexuals occupy a heavily gendered world which necessitates interacting with people differently. In this sense, although participants defined their sexual identities as attracted to people regardless of gender, in an everyday reality where participants had to relate to people according to cultural expectations, gender assumed significant importance in building relationships. Although in theory for the participants any or most genders could be a prospective partner, the gender of this prospective partner would impact on how the relationship would evolve. The space between the agency of the plurisexual and the structure of gender in society caused a disconnect between feeling and action for most plurisexuals.

Anxiety Around Prospective Partners

In considering their prospective partners, many participants expressed a degree of anxiety around who they would be with for various reasons. Primarily, these anxieties stemmed from a fear of judgment of their plurisexuality, a fear of biphobia, and a fear of violence or humiliation from prospective partners. For many cis women, anxiety revolving around men was due to the fear that men would dominate in the relationship.

A notable example of this anxiety over vulnerability was in Elizabeth's story. Elizabeth described her attraction as interested in non-normative gender expression for the most part, as she was "attracted to very feminine men or rather masculine women." However, in the course of the interview, Elizabeth referred to the fact she often felt most comfortable when in relationships with other women. She felt that women appreciated her femininity more, as men "don't have this certain level of adoration that you can get [with women]." Elizabeth was already somewhat uncomfortable with her gender, as she felt that she was only ever approximating what it meant to be a woman, and so being with men made her feel a little more uncomfortable. She expanded on these claims through saying:

> I found it always much harder to embrace femininity when being with men because you always feel that it might make you vulnerable. And it's so easy to fall into – unless it's a queer person as well, which most guys are not – it's so easy to fall into patterns and practices that I really don't like and I always felt that I needed to constantly make a point

> really, but I found it quite exhausting. I have had almost the opposite with some women […] I feel a little bit more relaxed with women though there are other vulnerabilities of course.

Elizabeth's feelings of vulnerability amongst men was not unusual within the sample of cis women and AFAB people. Many participants in these groups discussed the way in which masculinity could be intimidating, often in part related to the way in which toxic masculinity permeated gender behavior. Cis women and AFAB participants sometimes underscored the way in which they were somewhat more guarded around men:

> One of the reasons why I cut my hair aside from the fact that it was annoying me - but when I first really went for short short hair, it was because I was travelling abroad and I was afraid of being sexually assaulted
>
> *(Jana, 26, Biromantic Demisexual, Woman)*

These feelings of vulnerability or weakness due to the influence of men and masculinity tie in directly to narratives around what it means to be a man in contemporary society. The messaging men often receive revolves around being dominating, an aggressor, and a controller (Dill and Thill, 2007; Flood, 2008; Mendes and Carter, 2008; Kimmel, 2009). Due to the patriarchal hierarchy, which positions (white, middle-class, able-bodied) cis men as the highest-ranking social denominators, as well as the hegemony of masculinity which ranks and celebrates particular types of masculinity (Connell, 1995), it is often more socially acceptable or celebrated to be an aggressive type of man. As Phipps et al. have pointed out, this impression of masculinity, rape culture, or lad culture as applicable to all men requires nuance, as intersectional identities can impact on all experiences (Phipps *et al.*, 2018). As Phipps et al. highlight, "within populist discourses such as 'lad culture' and 'rape culture,' there is a tendency to essentialise the male body *as violence"* (Phipps et al. 2018, p.6). Although we must understand the nuances here, these sociocultural processes of extreme gendering, and ranking genders help develop and sustain a culture which premises women as sexual objects under the male gaze (Mulvey, 2013). These social trends influenced the way in which participants responded to men, with descriptions of men being more aggressive, dismissive, or sexually oriented in a way that often left AFAB people and cis women feeling vulnerable. Some cis men and AMAB people felt similarly vulnerable around men, but in this context, it was often due to the competition between masculine people related to hegemonic masculinity as described by Connell and Kimmel (Connell, 1995; Kimmel, 2009), or to the fact that they felt men were more sexually oriented and thus AMAB people or cis men guarded their romantic feelings more:

> I feel that interacting with men, there is always a - it's not an overt thing - but there's this bit of competition going on, that one man needs to feel a certain status with the other person, and it's a lot of the bonding experience that happens between men. And for there to be a bit of a romantic connection, this has to be sort of pierced
>
> *(Bern, 36, Pansexual, Genderfluid/Non binary)*

> I guess in a way though my relationships with men have been more fleeting […] my first experiences with guys was much different from the experiences I was used to with women because I felt quite a lot of weird sexual pressure that I hadn't felt with women
>
> *(Stan, 26, Queer/Bisexual, Cis man)*

These vulnerabilities relating to men were not universal across all genders but came up frequently enough that it is worth noting that the notion of dating particular types of men, or entering into a dating pool which involves men, can cause some discomfort for people, regardless of their gender.

These feelings of vulnerability also developed in situations involving dating or having sex with cis women. Most commonly, the feelings of vulnerability were more directly related to a lack of experience with women, and this was a common concern amongst all participants:

> With women […] I've never been on a date [with a woman] so I would have to really learn how to talk to women and how to communicate in that way with women […] I have had relations and feelings with other men, so I'm more experienced in that way
>
> *(Daniel, 26, Bisexual, Cis male)*

> [Knowing how to approach women is] tricky because […] I realised I was bi and then I started going out with a guy and just had so little experience, I feel like I don't know how - other than outrageous flirting - or being like 'hey I'm bi' - to let people know? Do you know what I mean? Do you have any tips?
>
> *(Gina, 24, Bisexual, Woman)*

The lack of experience with different genders could cause significant anxiety, which is demonstrative of the way in which plurisexuals need to learn heteronormative and homonormative scripts to

successfully function in sexual-romantic situations with different genders. In one US based online study, Reeves and Horne found that women who were in their first relationship with another woman experienced significantly higher levels of stress and less relationship satisfaction than women who had previously had a same-gender relationship, indicating the way in which experience benefits relationships (Reeves and Horne, 2009). Beyond fears over a lack of experience, AMAB people and cis men felt that people - particularly women - would not be attracted to them based on their plurisexuality:

> I started going on dating profiles advertised as bi, and one thing that struck me is how much it seems that there was a barrier just by saying that I'm bi - that less people replied. Less people seem interested
>
> *(Bern, 36, Pansexual, Genderfluid/Non binary)*

The concern over women not being attracted to plurisexual men is sadly not unfounded. There are many examples of plurisexual men being vilified or feminised on the basis of their sexual attraction to other men (Madon, 1997; Fingerhut and Peplau, 2006). This is connected to the hegemony of masculinity which dictates that men must attain to certain ideal concepts such as heterosexual, masculine, strong, commanding, and so on so forth (Connell, 1995; Kimmel, 2009), all of which participants suggested are at odds with the notion of being penetrated by another man. The worries over being seen as attractive were also based on partners disliking plurisexuality. Many participants referred to instances where their romantic partners had difficulties in accepting their plurisexuality:

> I think coming out to [partners] gives them the wrong signal, like […] you're just fulfilling one side of the story, that you might be interested in males or females if you're dating someone […] I think I still have to figure out how to introduce [my bisexuality] properly and not just have it come out like 'hey we are dating but I'm bi' - that sounds as if like I'm going to date you but I'm also going to date someone else
>
> *(Rishabh, 22, Bisexual, Male)*

> I had a partner when I was much younger, a guy, and he was really unhappy with [my attraction to women] and told me a lot of things that I just took to be true […] I just assumed [that] you can't properly love one person, you'll never be fully satisfied, you're going to end up leaving them - I don't know that it's necessarily selfish, but there's a part of you that if you love someone and you're monogamous with them, that you just have to put away. So those are my kind of associations with the idea of being bisexual
>
> *(Abha, 30, Sexual, Cis female)*

Participants' feelings of discomfort developing from their own partner's discomfort had directly influenced how they felt about their own plurisexuality, or how they entered into a relationship. Klesse and Li have demonstrated that, based on their sexual identities, plurisexuals may experience rejection, a lack of trust, and difficulties in negotiating monogamy/polyamory in the context of intimate relationships (Klesse, 2011; Li *et al.*, 2013). Experience bred caution or concern for many participants. Sadly, these reactions to plurisexuality are common. I have dated women who have tried to convince me that I am a lesbian. I have also dated men who have dismissed my sexual identity entirely, or who have tried to question me about it for their own titillation.

When I asked about participants' expectations of their future in a relationship, many participants had clearly considered how their romantic relationships would continue throughout their life from a gendered perspective. Participants who had not yet disclosed their plurisexuality to friends or family often referred to the fact that their future relationships could transform this:

> I'm with a girl who I think I'm probably going to be with forever […] there's no reason for me to come out to [my parents], apart from the fact I want to be open
>
> *(Stan, 26, Queer/Bisexual, Cis man)*

> If you're with a guy you have to worry about which people you can tell them to […] because you also worry about their safety, and sometimes they're not out with everyone
>
> *(Rishabh, 22, Bisexual, Male)*

> Should this relationship progress with this person, I'll probably be seen as a gay woman […] I'm not looking forward to "who is the man" questions […] I probably will consciously play up the feminine clothing
>
> *(Abha, 30, Sexual, Cis female)*

In these ways, prospective relationships were a source of great anxiety for many participants, and their anxieties often took shape in a gendered form. This in turn led to many fears around the imagined future of a relationship.

Heteronormativity: Fearing the Relationship Escalator

Single, young, or currently dating participants clearly thought about the future when they were considering the potential romantic partner in their futures. As previous chapters have demonstrated, participants thought significantly about how to navigate monosexism and homophobia through coming out to partners, having sex with partners in different ways, and being publicly in relationships that could be same-gender or different-gender. However, perhaps the greatest discussion point amongst participants in thinking of their futures was children. Participants had mixed views on whether or not they wanted children, but everyone pointed to the fact that it may be easier with a differently sexed partner, and that their families may prefer that they enter into a differently sexed relationship for the purpose of having children:

> I think it's easier to see yourself in a family unit when you have a female partner […] It's a much lonelier existence that I foresee when it's people of the same gender […] I do feel a family pressure when I'm in a male relationship. Because I've no doubt that they would love any child I adopt, but it wouldn't in their eyes be my child, my biological child
>
> *(Lee, 27, Bisexual, Male)*

Lee's concerns about the social and familial response to his prospective child was not common, but does highlight genuine manifestations of homophobia and heteronormativity. Lee's concern that his family would not accept an adopted child as a 'proper' grandchild, as well as the belief that fitting in with a traditional man/woman family pairing would be less lonely is indicative of the emotional and social barriers that have to be overcome for LGBTQ+ people to live their lives in the way they want to. Even if Lee were to have children with a man, it is clear that his choices would not be accepted as 'normal' or 'traditional' by his family, in his view. Many other participants felt that their families would not respect a same-gendered relationship:

> If I'm with a man then it's expected I will be my mother 2.0. We will get married and we'll settle down and we'll have a nice house and pop out a few children. With a woman I'm sad to say that I don't think a lot of my family would see it as a viable relationship
>
> *(Jade-Louisa, 24, Bisexual, Cis woman)*

The relationship escalator of marriage, house, children that Jade-Louisa describes was one that many participants drew attention to in the context of a differently-gendered pairing. Many participants found the idea of that rather suffocating, as it was expected and desired by their families, and by

society. As a result, participants felt that their roles would be predefined in a differently-gendered pairing, and that there would be little room for navigation. As other participants pointed out, being in a same-gendered pairing would require more discussion to decide on a future together:

> I might have considered a future differently with a female partner […] I've always wanted kids. And I would probably have to sit and do some thinking about adoption or how IVF would work with a same-gender, same-sex partner
>
> *(Sarah, 30, Bisexual/Pansexual, Cis female)*

In these ways, being in a same-gender relationship requires more emotional labour and planning. Many participants referred to the fact that, dissimilar to differently-gendered relationships, they would not assume as many things about the direction of a same-gender relationship, and would consequently navigate discussions around childrearing and domestic responsibilities differently. However, regardless of the social freedom and lack of expectations around same-gender relationships, some participants still felt it would be easier to have children in a differently-gendered partnership, so that the child would not experience secondhand homophobia and discrimination:

> I'd be more happy to have children with a female partner than with a male partner knowing the difficulties the child would have growing up
>
> *(Lee, 27, Bisexual, Male)*

Although all participants were cognizant that the gender and sex of their partner did not affect whether or not children may be present, it was clear that same-sex/same-gender child-rearing may be complicated by biological and social factors. For some, this meant that entering into a same-sex/same-gender relationship would be marred with worry about how to have a child, or how their child would be accepted by their families. Often these conversations connected with participants' acceptance of particular romantic scripts. With the advent of marriage equality in the United Kingdom, the growing acceptance of same-gender relationships, and the overall ability to have the same legislative rights regardless of their partner's gender, most participants felt that they could easily lead a similar life of cohabitation, engagement, marriage, and children regardless of their partner's gender. In many ways, the heteronormative script and the homonormative script meshed into one, to create a relationship escalator of progression from one step to the next. Some participants found this pressure frustrating:

> I guess now [being in a same gender relationship] can be slightly more [traditional] – you meet, you go out, you move in together, you get married, and I guess you can have kids now/adopt – that's still a bit controversial […] society tries to put all these relationships into that framework and if you do it in the wrong order, everyone gets confused
>
> *(Max, 20, Bisexual, Female/Genderqueer)*

Based on the external expectations of others, participants knew that there was a pressure to follow a certain model. Having children was a different experience depending on the genders in a relationship but could still be seen as an expectation. For participants who did not want children, did not want social pressure, or who were polyamorous, the collapsing of these scripts was not ideal. Relationship landmarks and expectations were established for romances, and only the question of children could affect this in many people's views. However, participants did underline how being in same-gender relationships gave them more freedom to forge a different path in some ways, through evading marriage, children, or monogamy.

7.3 Plurisexuals' Overburdened Romantic Possibilities

This chapter has highlighted how an adapted queer theoretical model is important for a reading of plurisexuality that integrates an awareness of the variability in relationship models, categorisations, gender relationships, and relationship potentialities. In being open to relationships that are different to traditional monogamous and heteronormative relationship models, this chapter has highlighted the variability of relationship models and relationship ideals in relationships, whilst drawing attention to the constraints present in a predominantly cisheteronormative society. Additionally, through paying attention to the lived experience of plurisexuals, constructing relationships in a narrative of everyday lives, this chapter has demonstrated how stigma and relationship norms (primarily monogamy and heteronormativity) can influence plurisexuals everyday lives.

Plurisexual participants were aware that their sexual identities could become a problem in attempting to find a romantic partner in their lives. Due to monosexism, homophobia, bigenderism, and cisnormativity, participants were restricted in their expressions and expectations. The stigma associated with holding a plurisexual identity, including being greedy, being a cheater, being hypersexual, and being an STD-carrier, did significantly impact plurisexuals' prospective dating views. Particularly as some participants felt that in disclosing their plurisexual identity, their partner would assume that they wished to be polyamorous, or could not have their desires sated by a single partner. These experiences and feelings conflicted with the desire to be authentically 'out' as a plurisexual person so that one could speak openly and honestly about their desires and romantic interests.

Participants who were happy in their relationships spoke at length about how their partners respected their sexual identities, would celebrate Pride with them, and would affirm their sexuality regularly in the course of their relationships.

In the course of conducting their relationships, it is clear that participants felt differently about their relationships based on the gender of their partner. Sexual contact was considered very different between genders, with participants having a great deal of anxiety about genders that they had not had sexual engagement with previously. Beyond the anxiety, participants felt that sex with different genders was for different purposes and different pleasures. In many ways, masculinity and femininity failed to adequately describe feelings between genders, as participants explored variable ways of being with bodies that moved beyond the gender binary.

Participants also discussed the impact of gender roles on their relationships. Broadly, participants felt that being with someone of a different-gender resulted in a heteronormative script that was claustrophobic, and assumed a progression along a relationship escalator that involved moving in, marrying, having a house, having a baby, and falling into particular domestic roles. In same-gender relationships, participants felt that there was a less of a model and therefore they could consequently have more agency in deciding the relationship that they wanted, and dividing the roles accordingly. Ultimately, although participants were attracted to people regardless of their gender, it is clear that this did not mean the relationships would be genderless. Instead, gender became a critical point for many people's relationships which affected the way participants flirted, had sex, got together, performed their relationship to others, and conceptualised the future. Participant's relationships were not unburdened, but rather held the weight of having to manage homophobia, monosexism, cisnormativity, the gender binary, *alongside* hetero and homonormative relationship models. Once more, the way in which participants navigated the sexual and romantic landscape whilst being plurisexual suggests a heightened sensitivity to gender and sex roles.

This chapter has contributed to the existing scholarship on plurisexual relationships. In particular, providing a contrast to Pennington's work (2009), this chapter has illustrated the complex navigation of gender in a relationship when one is plurisexual and trans or non binary. Additionally, given that the vast majority of literature into intimate relationships is often based on heterosexuality, this chapter has nuanced understandings of how gender roles can burden relationships through incorporating gender nonconforming individuals, as well as plurisexual desires into understandings of intimacy. Furthermore, incorporating a sample that has had experiences of polyamory, monogamy, asexuality, aromanticism, and kink/BDSM has added more subtle nuances into querying what intimacy might look like in contemporary relationship models. In particular, this chapter has demonstrated the

relationship between individual agency and desires and societal structures and expectations in romantic and sexual lives. That is, the space between the agency of the plurisexual and the structure of gender in society caused a disconnect between feeling and action for most plurisexuals. In essence, relationships are not divorced from cisheteronormative practices. Plurisexuals act out relationships in different ways based on the gender of their partners. These experiences are necessitated by cisheteronormative social understandings of gender roles and sexual practices (i.e. relationship roles and sexual pleasure). Given this dynamic, and the way in which gender is operationalised and navigated by plurisexuals in relationships, the next chapter will explore how plurisexuals understand their own gender identities.

Chapter 8: Gender Ambivalence and Plurisexuality

8.0 Plurisexuality, Embodiment, and Gender

Previous chapters have explored the ontological chasm experienced by plurisexuals living in a dominantly monosexist ontology and the resultant development of a plurisexual ontology whereby individuals become *Sexual Renegades* (or *Sexual Outsiders*). However, the previous chapter illustrated how relationship dynamics are established, which often fall into gendered patterns and norms, reifying gender roles and hetero/homonormativity.

This chapter explores plurisexual notions of gender more closely through the narrative of the plurisexual participants. It is apparent that the dominant gender-sex-desire matrix (Butler, 2007) enables a flourishing of cisnormativity, heteronormativity, and homonormativity that squeezes the possibility of visibly being recognised as plurisexual through gendered means. However, plurisexual people who become *Sexual Renegades* use and manipulate gender norms for different purposes at different points. Although bigenderism and binaries are the very issues I problematise throughout this thesis, I have divided cis experiences from trans and non binary experiences. The decision to do this was not taken lightly in writing this chapter, particularly considering some trans participants rejected using the trans label in describing their gender identities. I do not wish to suggest that there are inherent differences or that there is a binary opposition between these groups. Rather, I wish to have the space to address the complex discriminations that trans and non binary people experience on the basis of their gender identity as a result of the imposition of the gender binary, which cis people experience differently.

This chapter contributes to understandings of gender from a plurisexual lens. This chapter contributes to theories concerning gender difference and experience amongst cis, trans, and non binary people. The work presented here nuances previous schools of thought within plurisexual scholarship, which as I set out in chapter 3, either characterise plurisexuals as 'gender transcendent' or adopt queer theoretical approaches that often lack an empirical engagement with plurisexuals' lived experiences or omit the significance of the body and gender in shaping experiences and identities. This chapter – emphasising a plurisexual gender ambivalence – will adopt the amended queer theoretical position to understanding plurisexual relationships to gender. Through holding a queer suspicion of categories and the limitations of gender, whilst also acknowledging the constraints of lived experience, this chapter will explore individual approaches to personal gender identity. This chapter contributes not only to plurisexual and sexuality scholarship, but also to wider gender theory through emphasising lived experience.

8.1 Twisting the Cistem: Cis People and Gender Performance

Stan's Story

Stan is a 26-year old queer/bisexual cis man who participated in both phases of the research, and taught me a lot along the way. The first thing Stan said when I mentioned gender was "I feel very restricted by [being a man]." Stan had thought about masculinity a lot before our interview as it had been something that had affected him a lot as he was growing up. He highlighted the fact that he had an extremely masculine father who prized masculine traits like stoicism, strength, and being the breadwinner. Stan had also grown up in a working-class rural area which he said had greatly impacted the way in which he related to his friends and romantic encounters as a teenager. Stan reflected a lot on how he had grown up around people who prized masculinity, and who saw it as necessary for a man to take on particular gender roles in these ways. However, when it came down to it, Stan could not define what being a man meant to him. He found the concept overwhelming and could not explain what role this identity played for him, and how much of his conceptualisation of his gender was pure performance for others.

When Stan realised he was bisexual and came out to his friends, he felt that he had to perform his sexuality in a hypersexualised hypermasculine way to prove his sexuality and keep up with his friends. Although he said that in retrospect none of them actually gave a damn about what he was doing, Stan referred to the fact that he had put himself in some sexual and romantic situations that he did not want to be in to prove to his friends that he was sexual enough and queer enough to earn the labels of a bisexual man. Later, as Stan began dating women, he was very aware of how he felt masculinity and femininity should be performed in sexual scenarios. He did not want to be a vulnerable or submissive partner when with women, as he thought that they would not find this attractive. Consequently, he struggled a lot with his enjoyment of being penetrated, particularly when with women, as he felt this was not masculine and therefore not attractive to them. At the time of the interview, Stan had put these concerns to rest, and knew he could be a man in any way he wanted to be.

Stan is in a long-term relationship with a cis woman, and he spoke about how he could see himself being with her forever. However, because he was partnered with his girlfriend, he was perceived as a heterosexual cis man in public and was frustrated with having his queer/bisexual identity invisibilised. Consequently, Stan was in the process of trying to become more visible so that he could be recognised as queer/bisexual by both LGBTQ+ and heterosexual people, but also so he could act as a role model for other people who may be plurisexual. As a result, he turned to expressing his sexual identity through the clothes he wore. Stan felt he was able to both pass as heterosexual and

show his queerness through his outfits. Depending on what he was wearing, he knew that those 'in the know' (i.e. LGBTQ+ people) would be able to pick up on queer-coded items that he was wearing, whilst those who weren't 'in the know' (i.e. heterosexuals, potentially intolerant ones), would assume that he was a heterosexual cis man. This dualism of both communicating and passing was balanced carefully for Stan, and was a matter of safety for him when walking on the streets. Stan did this through playing with masculine and feminine elements of fashion simultaneously in his outfits to reference both elements of the gender binary:

> When I want to seem visibly bi, I'm more feminine […] I'm like 'ooh if I camp it up a bit, people will know'

Stan's desire for people to know rested on him performing his gender differently so that people could tell that he did not follow normative expectations around gender. Stan's experiences of understanding his gender and his careful performance of gender are indicative of many issues raised in interviewing cis participants that will be unpacked further in the next two sections.

Cis Understandings of Gender

I asked participants a lot about gender in the course of our interviews. All participants initially began by talking about men and women, as is expected in a dominant bigender system, however, all participants expanded and nuanced their thoughts on gender to speak about trans and non binary identities. This knowledge of various gender identities came through consistently from cis participants and as I went through the interviews I felt that I must have stumbled across a variety of people who were extraordinarily well versed in queer gender theory or queer activism. However, having completed all interviews and having had no participant who expressed a particularly essentialist perspective on what their genders meant, I suggest this is in fact connected to the fact that plurisexuals develop a plurisexual ontology and epistemology and therefore have to interrogate gender on the basis of sexual desire, and consequently spend more time ruminating on what different genders mean in various contexts. How participants came to believe what they believe is difficult to conclude based on the interview data. However, what can be seen is the way in which gender was considered by many to be an illusory fraud, to an extent:

> [I identify as a woman] partly because that's how other people see me and treat me and conceptualise me. I don't think I've got a hugely strong sense of 'I am a woman' but […] I'm not trans so therefore I'm a cis woman […] There have been times with the whole mark

> your identity stuff where I did wonder if I might be non binary but I think a lot of that came from this anxiety of 'do I identify as a woman? Not really
>
> *(Simone, 24, Bisexual, Cis woman)*

Simone's half-hearted engagement with womanhood was indicative of many participants' relationship to their gender identities, who felt that they did not have a particularly strong connection with any gender expression, and consequently related to their gender out of a matter of routine:

> You fill in your forms and write it in your passport and everywhere. […] if the forms weren't the case, if you didn't have to do that bureaucracy of filling the forms, I wouldn't mind if people said you were genderfluid or something because in the end, we as humans are very complex […] I think […] it's been happening for a long time, like I've been calling myself male and I'm not going to change it
>
> *(Dave, 57, Bisexual, Male)*

Many participants felt that they had been assigned their genders at birth and had never engaged strongly enough with an interrogation of what that meant for them to warrant changing their gender identities. However, participants were aware that their genders could change in future, or if they thought deeply about it:

> I identify as a woman but I find it very difficult to figure out how much of that is society and how I've been brought up and how that's determined my gender identity - how much is just complacency? […] If I did interrogate myself about it, it could be another thing that's fluid. It could be a spectrum, it could change. But now - woman is where I stand
>
> *(Jade-Louisa, 24, Bisexual, Cis woman)*

Jade-Louisa's discussion around gender identity is indicative of my own experience in relating to my gender. In beginning this PhD project, I identified as a cis woman. I had never met anyone non binary before, and had never considered a gender outside the binary. I confess, I often queried whether identifying as non binary was redundant as I thought one could just expand one's own gender to stretch the definitions of 'man' and 'woman. I thought this could derail gender norms and expectations. However, in the course of interviews, and particularly when interviewing non binary people, I became more aware of how my own sense of selfhood is more strongly connected to a non binary identity. Of course, as will be demonstrated later in the chapter, non binary experiences are

extremely variable, and there is no one way to feel in identifying as non binary. In my case, I had questioned whether or not I was a trans man when I was younger, however in retrospect these feelings had been tied up with my queerness, and the fact I was not performing heterosexual womanhood and therefore was 'not a real woman'. As time passed, I understood I was not a trans man, but continued to feel very separate from the concept of womanhood. I do not menstruate. I am interested in multiple genders. I clothe myself in non-feminine ways. I do not style my hair 'heterosexually' or shave my legs and armpits. I felt deeply constrained by the need to be sexually attractive and available to heterosexual cis men, specifically – demonstrative of the compulsory heterosexuality and bigenderism that exist in society. Consequently, whenever I was around other women I felt like a whole different species. I have extremely close friendships with cis women, both queer and heterosexual, and I feel like we live in different worlds sometimes. I feel so distinctly separate from the concept of ideal womanhood, and for a long time I just thought it was because I was queer and that was that. However, over the course of the PhD, I came to realise through speaking to other non binary people that my gender fluid expression and sense of separation could be interpreted differently leading me to identify as non binary. This is all still an exploration, but, for the moment 'they/them' pronouns and being a 'person' and not a 'woman' feel deeply validating. I am a constant work in progress, and gender is changeable, but my complacency with womanhood was tested in the course of this PhD and it changed me.[11] Daniel, a bisexual self-described cis male had a similar perspective on gender:

> at the moment [my gender is] male. I can sometimes be a bit fluid where I'm either cis male or agender, just don't go by any gender at all, which is occasional but a lot of the time I am, I'm non binary, agender. So, I don't consider it important to identify as any gender at all, at times I don't identify as a male and stuff like that
>
> *(Daniel, 26, Bisexual, Cis male)*

[11] After writing this reflection on my own gender identity, I went to consult with some friends of mine who are queer women. I asked if they had ever felt that they weren't part of a larger womanhood due to their queerness. None of them said that they had ever felt that way. Although anecdotal, I'm still frankly shocked that they hadn't – I really believed this was common and a part of the queer femme experience for a long time. Thankfully, engaging in this research showed me I didn't need to feel as much of a failed woman and I could adopt a new more empowering label instead. Changing the narrative and the whole ball game has helped me feel at home. Not that people understand it, but that is their problem, not mine.

This notion of transformation and change was relevant to many cis participants and their gender identities. Most cis participants found it extremely difficult to discuss what their genders meant to them:

> I did a gender poetry workshop yesterday […] I found it really hard to write about my own gender, I found it really difficult […] why can't I just be my own myself?
>
> *(Stan, 26, Queer/Bisexual, Cis man)*

The cis approaches to gender evoke Judith Butler’s theories around performativity and the gender-sex-desire matrix in that cis participants could not strongly phrase what their gender identities meant to them either emotionally or biologically. In some cases, cis participants played with gender expression and identity in intimate moments to explore different experiences:

> I'd [identify as] female […] I think certainly during sex, gender gets wibbly wobbly. As I've grown into an adult I've grown happy with female but when I'm with partners then it goes any which way but that's usually changing so quickly you can't label it
>
> *(Carys, 34, Bisexual, Female)*

> In sexual contexts for a while I found it quite interesting to - I'm looking for the right word here - in my mind be the man sometimes, both with men and with women
>
> *(Elizabeth, 45, Undefined, Woman)*

This sense of gender flipping was not as explicitly discussed with other participants; however, it speaks to the way in which a non binary-esque identity or gender bending was appealed to in many narratives. Many cis participants discussed how trans and non binary people informed their perspective on gender and helped them feel more comfortable with themselves through expanding the possibilities of gender expression and performance. This representation is also critical for trans and non binary people who attempt to solidify their identities through finding others similar to them (Austin, 2016). Although labels do not mean much in the grand scheme as we can change and switch them, considering gender identities with labels allows people to consider their gender identity and test the flexibility of gender and push into other forms of gender expression. However, the current cisnormative and bigender system consistently centers and privileges cisnormative expressions.

All in all, it appears that cis participants were well aware of the gender binary, and were well aware that the premises underpinning norms and expectations around gender were problematic and had no basis in objective truths. Participants had a wide-ranging knowledge of gender, understanding it to be constrictive and borne out of routine. They also saw how cisnormativity meant a rejection of non binary and trans identities in social and institutional spaces. Participants felt that their gender could be different as they did not have an overtly emotional bond to their gender identities. In many ways, cis plurisexuals saw gender as unhelpful and unnecessary in relation to their senses of identity. Bigenderism and cisnormativity had social impacts on participants – particularly as regards their sexual identity - as will be demonstrated in the next section.

Cis Performances of Gender

Cis participants were aware of expectations around gender, promulgated through the bigender system. Participants pointed out that this gender binary division resulted in socially imposed gender roles which were different for men and women. Participants discussed expected behaviours based on the gender of the individual, behaviours which were coded as masculine or feminine. Women often discussed their feelings of fear or vulnerability in public spaces due to the sexualisation of women and the notion that women were sexual objects. Cristina, a cis woman from Latin America, discussed how her womanhood had made her a vulnerable target to patriarchal aggressive heterosexuality:

> [Back home] you just go into the street and you will get yelled at in the best case scenario […] I didn't want to [dress] feminine, so as not to attract any attention […] you will still get yelled at or harassed or touched
>
> *(Cristina, 33, Bisexual, Cis gender woman)*

Cristina discussed how the implications of a heterosexual and aggressive misogynistic patriarchy had made her adapt her dress and gesture in public to avoid harassment. Due to similar experiences of the patriarchy and misogyny, many women had struggled at some point in their lives with engaging with their femininity, feeling that they had to fight against the patriarchy and some people dealt with some internalised misogyny:

> I've been thinking about how much of my reluctance to proclaim femininity (as a kid and now) is related to internalised misogyny. I think maleness as a desirable trait and femaleness as undesirable has had an unfortunate influence on my experience of my own

> gender. That might explain the lingering cringe feeling I have about proclaiming/embracing my cis female identity
>
> *(Kal, 32, Pansexual, Cis woman)*

This inability to feel a strong relationship to one's gender identity resulted in many participants feeling that they had failed at being a woman in various ways. Participants referenced a version of ideal womanhood that was inhabited by heterosexual women. In describing ideal womanhood, participants generally felt that an 'ideal' or 'real' woman was heterosexual, hairless, white, discriminated against, and sexually available/attractive. As a result, bonding was achieved on the basis of heterosexuality and beauty regimes for many women:

> Many straight women bond by slagging off their husbands to each other. You know, yeah 'Ah they're useless aren't they hee hee hee hee'
>
> *(Elizabeth, 45, Undefinable, Woman)*

In failing to follow these gender trends, either due to sexuality or due to a lack of interest, some cis women felt that they failed at their gender. In particular, women referred to cis women's physical standards, such as hairlessness, a small frame and more. Gillian was one woman who felt that she failed according to the standards of womanhood:

> I have PCOS[12] […] it kind of makes you physically more male, a lot more masculine attributes […] I grow facial hair, I'm losing this hair (referring to head) […] I don't menstruate very often […] it's that 'this is making me more like a man' […] it was distressing at first […] but nowadays it's like the fact that these things are physically happening to me doesn't make me any less of a woman because I know trans gender women […] I understand that what is physically going on does not make me any less of a woman
>
> *(Gillian, 29, Bisexual, Woman)*

[12] PCOS stands for Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome. This is a common condition affecting those with ovaries that results in irregular periods, excess androgen, and polycystic ovaries which can result in the symptoms that Gillian describes in her narrative, as well as possible fertility problems.

As is the case in Gillian's narration, most of those who felt that they failed some physical standard of cisness had reconciled their gender identities with their physical bodies by the point of interview. As Gillian demonstrates, the notion of failing a cis physical standard immediately associates the individual with a different gender. Through failing to appropriately demonstrate feminine traits of hairlessness and fertility, Gillian felt that she was more like a man. The participants noted that if one is a cis woman, to be seen as manly or masculine is culturally inappropriate and unattractive. This is due to how gender is established as oppositional and complementary, and the resultant heteronormativity suggests that masculine men should romance feminine women (Butler, 2007). Beyond the associated physical standards of a cis gender, the majority of cis women focused on the way in which they deviated from expected feminine social roles:

> I would not consider myself to be society's idea of a typical woman […] I think I am a woman, this is what being a woman means to me, society might see it differently, I don't care they can go and do whatever they do
>
> *(Sarah, 30, Bisexual/Pansexual, Cis female)*

Many women discussed the way in which they did not fit into an ideal. However, many women had reconciled with this, and had found a freedom in gender expression and gender identity that did not rely on the cis-normative/heteronormative judgment of others.

Men had similar narratives to women in understanding their genders. There was slightly more of a divide in terms of the depth of understanding and awareness of gender. Some men had clearly not thought deeply about their genders before, and were – if anything – confused about the questions I asked them regarding their gender identity. This is likely indicative of the way in which men are not routinely discriminated against on the basis of their genders and therefore do not need to consider gender on a daily basis. However, some men had considered their gender sensitively and at length. A few participants referred to 'toxic masculinity' in the course of our interview, using this term to refer to a number of different elements. The pressure to be sexually driven and not romantically driven was discussed at length by Stan:

> I used to say it to come out to friends like 'I just love anybody', or if it's in a really laddy situation then just 'Yeah I'll just fuck anybody' like, really aggressive attitude to something that's really emotional to you […] You know, trying to lad it up
>
> *(Stan, 26, Queer/Bisexual, Cis man)*

Flood has noted that men have to be sexually driven (typically heterosexually driven) to achieve a masculine status and bond with other men (Flood, 2008). Interestingly, the way this played out for Stan was rather unique. Kimmel writes of masculinity, referring to the sexual aggression and policing of gender roles. Kimmel writes that masculinity is implicitly homophobic, differentiating men who are sexually or romantically interested in men as feminine (Kimmel, 2009). However, Stan's experiences suggest his 'laddish' friend group accepted his plurisexuality. However, the need to be sexually aggressive was still important here as Stan felt pressure from his friends to engage in sexual experiences with both men and women. As a result, Stan had entered into sexual relationships and encounters he was not proud of or happy with on reflection after coming out as bisexual:

> There were times where I felt quite a pressure to prove [my bisexuality] to them […] we would also boast about the girls that we had slept with - and they were all a bit like 'well, but you also like guys so? we're not hearing about any of that sort of thing?' […] I remember thinking it quite a lot - and it wasn't about proving [my bisexuality] to me then, it was about 'oh shit, people are going to think that I just said this thing' […] I put myself in some positions that I didn't really want to be in and was like 'eurgh, what am I doing?'
>
> *(Stan, 26, Queer/Bisexual, Cis man)*

Stan discussed how he put himself in various sexual situations to prove his sexuality to his friends. This peer pressure, resulting from the fact that he was expected to be sexually driven, left him with memories that made him cringe whilst recollecting what had happened to him. Stan's experience calls into question the contemporary salience Kimmel's masculinity as homophobia thesis. Here, Stan's same-gender interest was incorporated into a wider sexual aggression relevant to masculinity. This is perhaps indicative of increasing LGBTQ+ social acceptance since the 2003 original publication of Kimmel's piece. Alternatively, given that Stan's account was not reproduced by other men participating in the study to the same extent, he could just have a particular set of open-minded friends. This is an avenue of research worth further exploration. Many participants also noted the stoicism required by men in their relationships and day-to-day nature, as they had to be 'blokey-blokes' (Lee, 27, Bisexual, Male). This in turn meant that femininity and masculinity was externally policed:

> If you start behaving more feminine, they assume you're more gay. If you start becoming more masculine, you're suddenly more straight
>
> *(Rishabh, 22, Bisexual, Male)*

The links between femininity, masculinity, and sexuality were explicitly drawn on by various participants, particularly men. In contrast to Stan's account, many accounts suggested plurisexuality was not accepted in men's social groups. Plurisexual men are rarely represented in society and consequently the stigma around male plurisexuality is considerable (Rust, 2000; Steinman, 2000, 2011). Multiple participants discussed their belief that, overall, women had an easier experience of being plurisexual than men. Mike said that he felt stifled by the necessity of identifying as male. He, amongst other participants, dwelled on the restrictive nature of masculinity and gender whilst also acknowledging his position of privilege:

> I think that people could and should just be people and your identity is your own personal thing and you don't need to be put in a box […] I do understand that I've had a lot of benefits from my gender […] it would be very very unfair of me to just go 'I don't believe in this, I'm going to wipe it out and I'm still going to dress and present as I am and most people are going to perceive me to be a man but you know, gender is meaningless!' because it isn't but it should be
>
> *(Mike, 36, Bi+, Male)*

Broadly, most men discussed the way in which they felt that they did not match up to the stoic ideal of manhood, whereby men were strong, the provider, emotionless, sexually-driven and competitive. However, in contrast to women, men did not have a consistent sense of vulnerability when in public spaces.

It is clear that cis men and women felt that there were clear standards and roles for the binary genders, which promoted heterosexuality and maintaining a complementary binary. The vast majority of participants felt they failed the cis gender standards in multiple ways. Although gender was understood by participants as illusory, participants understood that performing gender was important to avoid the discrimination or disgust that went along with those who did not adhere to the bigender, cisnormative system. In this way, plurisexuals were ambivalent about gender, simultaneously acknowledging its role in their expression and social acceptance, whilst also understanding that their gender did not significantly or wholly define their sense of self.

8.2 Smashing the Cistem: Trans and Non Binary People and Gender Performance

Jessie's Story

In the course of this research, I was fortunate to be able to speak to a wide range of people who had various different gender identities. Given that research into plurisexuality typically focuses on cis women, it was a core principle in my study design to be able to hear from trans men, trans women, and non binary people.

Jessie's story was extraordinarily impactful. I had spent a long time travelling to see her following a series of intensive interviews in another area, and upon being greeted enthusiastically, I was quickly charmed by her humour and eloquence. My field diary later noted how at points the interview had seemed emotional and distressing, but this was often diffused using humour so that we could maintain a fast-paced and witty interview. Jessie identified herself as female/genderqueer/enby[13] whilst completing the demographics form. Jessie's experience of her gender identity was complicated and clearly difficult for her. Raised in a relatively rural area, Jessie came from a family with a very dominant father figurehead who, in Jessie's words "thinks that the BNP are a bunch of milksoft liberal wishy washy not really committed to the cause enough kind of person." Jessie did however have women in her family who quietly identified as bisexual, although this was never explicitly discussed during Jessie's time living at home. Jessie began to explore how she felt about her sexual identity during her teenage years, knowing full well that there were things about her gender she had to unpack, but she chose to avoid this at first, feeling that she could only explore one aspect of her identity at a time. Eventually, after she had settled a little more with her sexual identity, Jessie felt prepared to explore her gender a little later into her time at university. Jessie began by going to the bookshop and selecting a book with 'transsexual' in the title, unfortunately picking up *The Transsexual Empire* by Janice Raymonds which is an infamously transnegative book that – as Jessie summarises - claims that "trans women are agents of the hetero patriarchy […] and trans men are lesbians who are being bullied by the medical establishment." Fortunately, Jessie had enough self-confidence to dismiss this initial foray into what it meant to have a trans identity. Jessie went to a doctor to explore potential physical changes to her gender, however, the mandated required therapy associated with a medical transition "latched on to the fact that I was bisexual and said 'we can't

[13] Enby is an abbreviated form of the word 'non binary'. It is being increasingly used by non binary people to describe themselves, and is a term that connects to a wider community. It is deemed to be a politically correct abbreviation when compared to 'NB' which is coopted from BAME discussions in reference to 'non-black' people.

possibly do anything about your gender until we've sorted out your confusion about your sexual orientation'" and consequently Jessie decided:

> Fuck off, you are clearly so wrong, you do not get access to my body, I need to find a different way of doing and living this because this is going to involve bigger political compromises over who I am than I am prepared to make

Jessie said later that this meant that she avoided doing what she termed as the '100 metre dash' in the course of transitioning, where a person figures out their identity and then goes through a gender transition as fast as possible. Given that Jessie chose not to access gender reaffirming surgery or hormones due to a loss of trust in expertise, Jessie had to figure out a way of living her identity that could be in harmony with her external appearance. Consequently, Jessie spent some time talking about her fashion, which she described as 'streetsafe'. Having been 'queerbashed' multiple times, hospitalised at points, and experiencing PTSD, Jessie knew above all that she simply wanted to be safe in the streets through not appearing excessively feminine. Jessie now lived her life in this cautious way, proudly vocal and activist about her identities, but passing where she felt she needed to. Jessie's gender identity also had a significant impact on her experiences of dating and sexuality. As opposed to referring to a dating pool, Jessie referred to a 'dating puddle', where her options were limited due to her gender identity and due to the intolerance she regularly experienced. She spoke about the difficulties in finding a partner that was simultaneously accepting of her bisexuality, her gender, and her polyamory.

Jessie's story and gender experience were not unique amongst the other non binary and trans participants I spoke to. The institutional limitations, the external policing of gender, and the consequential public performance of gender were fraught for many people. Consequently, this subtheme will explore the constraint of cisnormativity and the gender binary for trans and non binary people. This chapter is part of a concentrated effort to position trans and non binary identities as central voices in interpreting and understanding gender, given the historical omission and derision these identities have experienced. I have separated the experiences of non binary and trans people purely because no participants identified as both, although other people not included in this study do feel both trans and non binary simultaneously. Clearly, my own (current) gender identity as a non binary person is interpreting these voices, and that should be considered when reading my own analysis and evaluation of the interviews with trans and non binary participants as I have limited and recent experience of what it is to live in a world so remarkably hostile to your gender.

Gender Binaries and Non Binary People

Non binary people had a difficult – if not impossible - time in being recognised in mainstream (cisheteronormative) society. Similar to cis participants, when discussing gender, non binary participants often focused on discussing men and women. Falling in with bigenderism, participants discussed a social reality of gender, where women occupied one half of the division, and men the other. In comparison with cis participants, non binary and trans participants had very different experiences of these binary genders, resulting in misgendering and a lack of recognition. For trans and non binary participants, the battle to be understood and seen as they were was the constant struggle, as seen in Jessie's story. The implications of not fitting in a cisnormative dynamic often resulted in more extreme acts of violence from others - from verbal harassment, to acts of physical violence, to misgendering - non binary and trans participants occupied a vulnerable position if they failed to perform their genders appropriately. Although almost all non binary and trans participants touched on this, this was generally a more heightened concern for trans feminine participants rather than trans masculine participants, due to the amount of transmisogyny in contemporary culture (Arayasirikul and Wilson, 2018). Cisnormative expectations, as discussed in the previous subtheme, meant that participants were regularly perceived as men or women. This was particularly difficult for non binary participants:

> I'm perceived as being female all the time, when they see tits it's 'oh female' and so that goes double, and the hate and yeah
>
> *(Jacq, 49, Bisexual, Non binary)*

In Jacq's experiences, they were often interpreted as a woman due to the shape of their body and the social primacy of bigenderism that sorts people into women or men based on their secondary sexual characteristics (i.e. breasts, facial hair). For some, this bigender system also connected with heteronormativity:

> Because I've generally been seen, known, to be with women, I think everybody assumes I'm straight. And I really just don't correct them
>
> *(Bern, 36, Pansexual, Genderfluid/Non binary)*

In this case, Bern's pansexuality was erased whilst they were simultaneously read as a man, leading to double invisibilisation of their identities. As Bern knew that explaining both identities

would require a lot of emotional labour, they chose not to correct others in public. The frustration of being read as cis was clear in many accounts:

> I am read as a cis man virtually all of the time when I go out […] And I'm not overly bothered by it—but at the same time, I wish the eyebrowless, weird other thing were more visible to people sometimes
>
> *(Hyde, 26, Bisexual Asexual, AMAB Genderqueer Demiboy)*

Hyde refers here to the different gender explosions they adopted through drag and through other body work. Hyde felt less dysphoria when completely shaved, including their eyebrows, and for them this was an important and gendered aspect of their appearance that entirely deviated from masculinity and femininity to create a wholly different expression of self. Misgendering is indicative of the binary way in which we understand gender, as well as the way we categorise visual appearance based on what we deem to be feminine and masculine traits. This misgendering led to wider problems around identifying as non binary:

> There is no non binary in the sense that […] that isn't how society perceives you - society will always try to put you into one of two boxes […] society also freaks out when you don't look like you belong in either of the boxes. […]I guess I don't feel like I fit in female, but also the idea of non binary or genderqueer as an overall identity I find quite difficult because I have no way of expressing that […] that might create problems for me in itself because if I'm like no, okay, I'm just going to wholeheartedly embrace being non binary, then I actually can't express that really easily?
>
> *(Max, 20, Bisexual, Female/Genderqueer)*

Max's lack of certainty on how to best represent their non binary identity was common across non binary participants who felt that they were often assumed to be men or women based on their appearance. Consequently, holding a non binary identity was difficult as it likely would not often be recognised and seen as such, leading to a broad unintelligibility for non binary people. Non binary participants spoke rather resignedly about this misgendering, discussing the ways in which asking people to use appropriate pronouns was a lot of work and required them to educate those around them. This misgendering, as shown in the extract above, led to a lot of identity questioning and insecurity regarding how best to live one's life and express oneself, as well as considering what to change about oneself so that one could truly be seen. To be seen is to be culturally intelligible and

consequently have social understanding (though perhaps not social acceptance) and institutional rights (Butler, 2007). Currently, non binary people have no legal recognition and are often forced to choose between two gender options when participating in institutions such as healthcare, HR forms, and legal gender identity. Many of the participants also drew parallels between their experiences of their gender identity and their experiences of their plurisexuality. This complexity of being illegible as a gender spilled into how they felt a partner might perceive them, as Bern described:

> I mean […] I don't know how a man would be attracted to me. Would they be attracted as a gay man, or as a man that - a pansexual man
>
> *(Bern, 36, Pansexual, Genderfluid/Non binary)*

Bern, an AMAB person, could not be certain how their gender would be understood by prospective partners, and whether or not they would be desired and loved as themselves or as a misrepresentation of themselves. Non binary identities attempt to evade the heteronormative and binary construction of gender that is well established in British society, and research has demonstrated how romantic relationships can be a positive source of self-esteem for non binary people if their partner affirms their gender in various ways, known as microaffirmations (Galupo 2019). This was important for non binary people in a relationship as, more commonly, they would be misgendered in day-to-day life. Due to the unintelligibility of non binary people, many related to binary gendered spaces. Max noted how women's spaces were still important to them due to patriarchal street harassment:

> I think it's important that women have women friends because you know, if a guy wolf whistles you on the street, you walk into my friends and be like '*sigh* guys'
>
> *(Max, 20, Bisexual, Female/Genderqueer)*

As Max was not perceived by others as non binary, they still experienced sex based discrimination and therefore needed women's spaces. Other AFAB people had encountered similar degrees of misogyny and so related more strongly to masculine spaces. Jules referred to how social spaces were divided by gender. As Jules (who is AFAB) felt that they did not relate to womanhood, they felt far more comfortable amongst men's spaces:

> I'm not perceived to be a man - I don't look like a man, and I'm not a man – […] they perceive me as a woman […] I prefer to be with guys and (AMAB non binary partner) was

> saying I prefer to be with girls - and I was like 'how can you like being with girls all they talk about is their weight' 'but they don't talk about that with me' - Aha!
>
> *(Jules, 32, Pansexual, Non binary)*

Interestingly, Jules' division of experience with their AMAB partner further suggests that the interpretation of one's gender significantly impacts one's social experiences. This division of worlds was noted by many participants, who broadly spoke about the way that queer communities were more at ease with gender nonconformity, and that being out in a cisnormative, heteronormative society meant needing to conform to particular ways of being. The comfort in ones' identity being taken seriously in an LGBTQ+ space affected the way in which non binary participants navigated disclosing their identities in different spaces:

> When you say to a queer person 'I'm non binary' they just get it [...] But if you're in a space where you don't look androgynous [and] people don't really understand and they're like 'well how can you say if you're non binary and you're wearing a dress and you're assigned female at birth' [...] I think you subconsciously try harder to adopt a more masculine self so that [cishet people] can respect your pronouns
>
> *(Kaden, 23, Bisexual, Non binary)*

Consequently, in a dominantly heteronormative, cisnormative society, performing one's gender is critical for non binary people in having their genders recognised. This was true in many cases. Most participants located their gender in society, that is gender is "a lot about presenting, about behaviours [...] it happens outside, it happens in society" (Bern, 36, Pansexual, Genderfluid/Non binary). Consequently, most people discussed and interpreted their gender through things that were understood as being masculine or feminine, whether behaviours or appearances. In essence, the majority of non binary people were regularly perceived as men or women and consequently they related to issues that many of the cis people described, purely due to the way that they were pigeonholed into categories by others. In discussing how they demonstrated their genders, non binary people had a wide range of answers. Some non binary people dressed in explicitly masculine or feminine ways and some non binary people dressed androgynously. However, one common connection was that most non binary people adapted their outfits and levels of femininity or masculinity depending on the space that they were in. Bern loved wearing dresses and feminine clothes for special occasions, but when it came to work they chose to limit their feminine expression a lot more:

> I don't want to bring out the whole potential consequences of advertising, coming out as something else - I don't want to deal with the lack of understanding, I don't want to have to explain nonbinaryness and I know that people won't understand. Some people will say 'oh that's not a thing' and I just don't want to deal with that
>
> *(Bern, 36, Pansexual, Genderfluid/Non binary)*

Bern's wish to remain relatively unseen is in keeping with the comments other participants have made about AMAB people being more strongly sanctioned should they fail to adhere to appropriate gender and sexuality etiquette. Similarly, in this particular extract, Bern's unwillingness to educate those around them is indicative of the broader unintelligibility of trans and non binary identities, and the numerous questions that come after a disclosure of identity – although research has demonstrated that some trans people enjoy educating friends around them in order to develop allies (Galupo *et al.*, 2014).

Cisnormativity and Trans People

Only three people I interviewed underscored being trans as part of their experiences; Jacub, Jessie, and Jake. Both Jacub and Jake no longer identified with a trans label and primarily wanted to pass in society. Jessie, as discussed in her vignette, had a somewhat more complicated relationship with her gender which was trans and non binary. As this sample is small, this data should not be taken as representative, however, their approaches to gender highlight a number of ongoing themes in this research related to cisnormativity and the gender binary. A common theme amongst people with a trans history was that of having to perform their gender in a world where it was a key social structure. Jacub found often found himself in situations where he had to respond to overt displays of gendered behavior:

> I'm a promo person [promoting clubs at nighttime] - but interacting with people on the streets, like proper cishet men that are walking around with their arms open, strutting their stuff and being like dead cringe and toxic and they're like 'you alright bro?' and I'm like 'yes I'm fine thank you' and they fist bump me, they shake my hand and do that weird shoulder thing, and I'm just like 'what is this, please get off me' - like, if you're not going to kiss me on the cheek, leave me alone. It's weird because I have to put on this persona to interact with different people on the outside world at work and it's just not what I'm used to, and it's definitely nice to come into a queer space at home and just be able to relax and not have to put on this macho gross toxic masculinity kind of thing. Like I wouldn't say I'm particularly feminine, but I also wouldn't say I'm particularly masculine
>
> *(Jacub, 22, Bisexual, Man)*

Jacub had a lovely home, clad in rainbows, that only housed queer people with many identifying as trans or non binary. In the course of the interview he spoke at length of how the homespace he had was so accepting and fun in comparison to the heteronormative spaces he more commonly had to occupy. As a result, Jacub had to respond to masculinity and heteronormativity outside, which jarred with his sense of self but ultimately meant that he avoided any trouble. Trans masculine participants, upon coming out, had gone to the extremes of masculinity in order to avoid any degree of doubt:

> Coming out as trans I'd do everything to kind of dress in typically male clothes, hide my chest, hide curves, whatever. But now I'm completely comfortable with my body. I'm fine with wearing anything that I feel completely comfortable in and my fashion has definitely evolved over time to more out there, wanting to draw attention to myself, and just being able to explore different fashion and different clothes and how I look and what makes me feel good
>
> *(Jacub, 22, Bisexual, Man)*

This was common for both Jake and Jacub, who softened their gender expression over time, either due to the fact that they now generally passed as their genders in public, speaking to how time and experienced increased confidence in one's identity for LGBTQ+ people.

In conducting the interviews, I did not delve too deeply into the experience of transitioning and how people came to understand their genders. This was for many reasons, the primary one being that it was not relevant to my exploration of plurisexuality to understand one's gender journey, and it also felt deeply personal and intrusive to question trans and non binary people about their historical genders. However, in the course of the interviews, many participants underscored a sense of inevitability regarding their gender transitions, a notion that it was always going to happen. Jacub, a man with a trans history, spoke about how he had previously tried his hardest to identify as a lesbian who was aggressive in the LGBTQ+ scene:

> I think it was a lot of denial as well through my gender identity that I didn't want it to come through. I just wanted to be this horrible dyke that stomped around everywhere and tried to be a peacock kind of thing […] So I was like 'shit I'm a boy, but I'm also bi - where does that leave me?' So that's why I didn't really come out until I was like 18 as trans. Yeah, it was like a jungle but in the lesbian community
>
> *(Jacub, 22, Bisexual, Man)*

Jacub spoke a lot about how, for many years, he had tried to be a lesbian. He knew that complicated feelings about his sexuality and gender were simmering under the surface and consequently amplified his lesbian identity, being biphobic and hostile to men more generally. Although he tried to fit into this model, eventually he realised he had to deal with his identities and later came out as trans and then bisexual. Jacub's story is also indicative of the homonormativity often present in LGBTQ+ spaces, where any deviation from a monosexist and cis gender identity could result in conflict (Formby, 2017). Consequently, due to the community Jacub was a part of, it was easier to identify as a cis lesbian. Trans and non binary participants had to overcome significant social difficulties including isolation, curiosity, and conformism in accepting their identities, as Levitt and Ippolito have demonstrated (Levitt and Ippolito, 2014). As a result, both Jacub and Jake actively rejected the label trans:

> Officially I would be male with a trans history. I don't currently identify with trans anymore just for personal reasons. Nothing specific, I'm just at that point in my life now where I've transitioned and I've done what I need to do to live so I don't have to tell everyone about myself
>
> *(Jacub, 22, Bisexual, Man)*

This desire to move on and stop identifying as trans seemed to be felt by participants who had done the work of navigating medical practices, passed in public, and felt comfortable with their identities.

Similar to non binary people, trans participants experienced difficulty in whether or not to disclose their identities. From deciding what kind of outfits to wear, to deciding who to disclose one's identity to, the participants discussed how they felt they had to consider their communications carefully. Even when participants did feel comfortable disclosing their identities, there was always the possibility that people would not understand:

> It kind of just seems that [discussing trans experience] get[s] kind of lost to [some people]. You can tell them certain things about your experiences and they will empathise with you, but even then it kind of feels like not everything is reaching them exactly. Like there's some kind of depth to it that they can't quite access […] I know people who are not trans - but because they've known for a long time or because they're a certain type of person […] they will understand it. And there are some people who kind of just won't
>
> *(Jake, 21, Bisexual, Man)*

This gap in knowledge or a lack of understanding could lead to trans people being positioned as educators, whilst also meaning that trans people could not find adequate support in talking about things that were important to them. Consequently, the need to find the right kin to discuss gender based issues with was critical. Hence, many trans and non binary people specifically referred to a large group of LGBTQ+ friends with whom they were able to discuss gender and sexuality. Formby has demonstrated the importance of communities, although they can often be troubled by transphobia, racism, and other exclusionary forces (Formby, 2017). These findings are supported by the results of this study as all participants felt they needed to find the 'right' community to be transparent about their identities. Jake and Jacub had transitioned many years ago and felt comfortable with their identities. As a result, they were able to reflect on the differences in disclosure that they had witnessed over time in their own lives:

> I came out as trans to my parents, the wider community, the world. And it was a struggle at first, just being able to accept myself, have other people accept me. It was a difficult time. But everyone's cool now. I don't think about it. I don't really think about being trans. It's not the be all and end all of me. It's a little tiny part, but it's not all of me so I like to put it to the side and not explain myself unless I'm going to be getting into any kind of sexual relationships […] if it comes up in conversation […] then I'll just join in and be like 'Oh yeah well I used to be as well' - I don't always do that. Unless I know someone really well and I've kind of built up that bond that I know they're not going to be shocked about it. But otherwise, I just live my life as male and that's it, that's just it
>
> *(Jacub, 22, Bisexual, Man)*

Many trans and non binary participants discussed these differences, and most participants chose not to discuss their gender identities or histories with people they felt would be unsympathetic. This was problematic for non binary people who would then consistently be misgendered, as people did not know their genders, whereas trans people would generally pass as cis. However, as demonstrated in the vignette, Jessie's experience was significantly different to that, largely due to her wish not to medically transition and consequently not to pass. Her decision not to medically transition is not uncommon, with many trans people choosing not to engage with medically affirming processes, or remaining highly critical of them, due to the paternalistic gatekeeping and othering of trans patients in medical institutions (Pearce, 2018). As a result of not receiving gender-affirming healthcare processes, the clothes Jessie wore were carefully chosen so as to not 'out' her on the street, and put her in danger. Her trans identity was also more forefront in her experience. However, between Jessie, Jake, and Jacub's varying experiences, it is demonstrable that the gender binary and cisnormativity

constrain expression and limit disclosure due to anticipation of hostile responses. Furthermore, gender – although a primary and important part of people's lives that links with feelings of authenticity (Levitt and Ippolito, 2014) – is not something that people want to explain to others at length. Most people simply want to be recognised. As such, representation in media and culture is sorely needed so that the onus of explanation does not fall on the individual.

Gender identity is clearly a complicated, personal, and deeply important topic for trans and non binary people. It is important to recognise that there is not a sense of homogeneity within trans and non binary groups (Roen, 2001; Hines, 2006b, 2017; Lombardi, 2009; Pearce, 2018), but rather that the experience of gender is deeply unique and individual for all participants. There are a few unifying experiences; cisnormativity, transmisogyny, and the binary gender system create a number of hurdles which trans and non binary people must overcome, such as being recognised, disclosing identities, and having one's gender identity policed or questioned in certain arenas. However, the successful navigation of these social barriers demonstrates how trans and non binary people are gender specialists, able to navigate cultural expectations whilst maintaining a sense of self. In fact, for Jake and Jacub, their experience of gender suggests an additional ambivalence to gender in the way that their genders were deeply important to them, resulting in them needing to come out and access resources to ease gender dysphoria. However, both referred to the way that they no longer felt they needed to perform masculinity to a high degree as they were comfortable with themselves, and could easily express themselves in ways that were described by them as feminine, as long as they were not in a position where they may be misgendered. The bigender cisnormative system clearly has an impact on one's gender identity and performance, however, it also impacts on one's sexual expression, as will be explored in the next section.

8.3 Plurisexuality and Gender Identity

Hyde's Story

Hyde is a 26 year old bisexual asexual AMAB genderqueer demiboy. I interviewed Hyde twice for both phase I and II. In the course of the photo diary, Hyde sent me a number of pictures of them in various drag looks – they were phenomenal photos. Full of colour and concept and the most incredible make up. As I am someone relatively new to drag, Hyde's photo diary showed me the many steps required in conceptualising a look, designing the outfit, sourcing the hair and make-up, and practicing putting it all together before even stepping out of the door. Furthermore, throughout our conversations, I was given many make up tips I was not aware of previously – did you know that duct tape is an extremely effective way of removing glitter?

Hyde would take items from everyday places and transform them into high fashion. They showed me an extremely glamorous look, parts of which were put together with yellow marigold gloves and a microphone attachment. Hyde's perspective on drag and gender was simply 'bigger.' They said:

> One of the things that drag does for me is that […] if you put seven inch heels on me and then a foot and a half of headwear, I am this enormous monster. That is a really validating genderqueer thing for me, because we think of size and 'bigness' as something that's masculine when it comes to bodies, and I love the idea of 'queering' that: putting that idea into a blender and shredding it up and making something that fits me out of the pieces.

Hyde said that although they did not consider their clothing as overly gendered, they were aware that they had to fit into a social system that was extraordinarily gendered. Consequently, they attempted to mess with femininity and masculinity, distorting notions of classic feminine beauty to reference horror movies, fascinations, and the unexpected. Hyde felt that through exploring different ways of using height and hairlessness, they could confuse and distort masculinity and femininity to make the categories meaningless. This was an ongoing attempt to battle heteronormativity as Hyde asserted: "heterosexuality is actually a wider culture and polices your behavior *all the time* – as this wider gendered set of assumptions and expectations."

Aesthetic was important to Hyde. Hyde said that the majority of their relationships had been with men or other masc people, which in some way made them feel that they had not explored their full potential as a plurisexual person. However, they felt strongly that they only wanted to be perceived as confusing and disarming as regards their sexuality and gender and the combination of both. They said:

> I don't want any relationship that's even remotely straight […] the women that I'm into are the queerest women in the world! I would like to have platonic-but-deep things with women where we were read as 'gay boy and lesbian' when we went out together

Hyde's desire for a platonic style relationship is due to their asexuality, however, their desire to play with gender and sexuality is indicative of the way in which they conceptualised these identities as enforcing normative beliefs on a wider population. Hyde wished to buck the trends of gender and sexuality as much as possible, feeling that they constrained all queer presentation and identity. Hyde

discussed how others often associated their drag with sexuality. Describing an outfit they wore which incorporated heels, a top hat, and lipstick, Hyde referred to how people would not make eye contact with them and stated how:

> a lot of people […] don't want children to encounter drag say[ing] 'no this is a sexualised thing! This is very adult!' – I don't even like sex! I am not even into it at all!

Hyde's relationship with their sexuality and gender highlight the interconnectedness of both in Hyde's view in terms of performance and reception to others. Although Hyde wished to explode notions of both gender and sexuality for other people, they were fully aware that their actions and image were interpreted in certain ways based on sexuality and gender. This section of the chapter explores other people's experiences of the connection between the performance of sexuality and gender in everyday visual ways.

Plurisexual Performances of Embodied Sexualities

Cis people represented themselves and their sexualities in various different ways throughout the interviews, toying with femininity and masculinity. Psychological research into image has highlighted how playing with femininity and masculinity can be a useful way of depicting one's sexuality to an external audience (Clarke and Turner, 2007; Clarke and Spence, 2013; Clarke and Smith, 2015). Specifically, wearing more masculinised clothes, or queer-coded items such as Doc Martens and plaid shirts can communicate a woman's same-gender interest (Huxley, Clarke and Halliwell, 2014). For men, adopting feminine gestures, feminine clothing shapes, or a variety in colour and texture can indicate a men's same-gender interest (Cleto, 1999). Unfortunately, these interpretations of others often pigeonhole men and women as gay or lesbian as opposed to plurisexual (Hayfield *et al.*, 2013). There are few ways in which a person can appear visually plurisexual (Hayfield *et al.*, 2013). However, for some participants, to be recognised as plurisexual was important at points in their lives and resulted in them making specific fashion choices:

> When I want to seem visibly bi, I'm more feminine which is confusing because that doesn't really make any sense because those things aren't really related. But I'm like 'ooh if I camp it up a bit, people will know' - but that's weird because that's not really presenting a version of me that's - it's another caricature of me, and I guess I don't really know what the real version of me being my own true gender identity is
>
> *(Stan, 26, Queer/Bisexual, Cis man)*

Most people wanted to be visually recognised as plurisexual using feminine or masculine coded items, sometimes merging them together to appeal to both sides of the spectrum. This is a common tactic amongst bisexuals, who adopt a – as Daly et al. term it - chameleonesque range of clothing, both masculine and feminine, to illustrate sexual preference through gendered items of clothing (Hartman, 2013; Hartman-Linck, 2014; Daly, King and Yeadon-Lee, 2018). Participants discussed how illustrating queerness can be done through wearing gender non-conforming clothing, but also through demonstrating a heightened sense of one's own gender to the point at which it becomes satirical and illustrative of gender as an illusion, such as in Hyde's case. Many participants simply did not want to be read as heterosexual:

> It doesn't matter super much for me to be recognised, except when I get read as straight
>
> *(Alice, 32, Bisexual/Queer, Cis woman)*

Many cis participants discussed how their presentation changed over time based on who they were in a relationship with. Stan stated how he currently looked less androgynous based on his girlfriend's preference. Gina, in a relationship with a cis man, said "if I was single right now, I would be trying to look a lot queerer" (Gina, 24, Bisexual, Woman). Many women said that when they had first come out they had tried to look as queer as possible through wearing masculine items of clothing and avoiding make-up and hair removal. Over time, this had softened and people had found their individual styles that often incorporated queer-coded items. Importantly, not all cis participants followed this model – a minority did not think about these issues whatsoever, would never change their outfits for another person, and dressed above all for comfort. For a small number of participants, the concern of not being read as open to all genders weighed heavily on their minds and was of a great concern:

> Generally around if I'm in a situation with a woman […] I might get an odd twinge of 'am I doing something too manly?' - and I did shave my head a few years ago and I was a bit heavier then as well, so I did look more like that butch - I think people would often assume I was gay
>
> *(Abha, 30, Sexual, Cis female)*

Abha referred to her internalised biphobia throughout the interview and often referred to the sense that this could be why she was afraid of appearing too masculine at points. In referring to her pink bedroom, and the fact she liked wearing short skirts and low tops, she said:

> I feel secretly glad that I have a pink and fluffy side because I just feel like it makes it easier to be these other things that maybe get conflated with being masculine and I don't have to worry that I get seen as too masculine
>
> *(Abha, 30, Sexual, Cis female)*

Abha's fear of being seen as overtly masculine speaks to the standards that women are held to within society. Particularly, it references compulsory heterosexuality and the fact that she was concerned that presenting a masculine image would be at odds with her social role as a woman (Rich, 1980; Butler, 2007).

Many participants chose to explode gender through their outfits in an attempt to demonstrate queerness. Participants spoke explicitly about where and when this was appropriate or safe to do, citing a fear of assault, verbal violence, and physical violence, as well as social rejection if they wore a particular outfit in a cisnormative, heteronormative environment. Stan summarised these feelings when he spoke about a recent concert he attended in an unfamiliar city, where he chose to wear fishnet stockings and other gender non-conforming items:

> So, I went to see a band that I really like. The frontman - he's straight but he's a crossdresser - he talks about it loads […] after that gig […] I was wearing shorts, fishnets, I had a bleach wash denim jacket on with a shit load of pride badges - I say a shitload - like 3. But it felt like an awful lot when I was standing in that pizza place […] I was very aware that all of these people around me probably are not used to people like me, and I didn't know what people's attitudes in (city) are to things like that because I don't know the city […] with big cities it doesn't mean that people are more open-minded, it just means that there is probably a space for you, and if you're not in that space, that doesn't make you any safer. I was kind of quite aware that maybe someone was going to say something - I saw the guy when I ordered my food clock everything […] and that made me feel weird, because he's the guy that if anyone was weird in here, he's the guy I would look to to be like 'you're the guy with the fucking phone' - and if I can see that he's like 'what the fuck is going on' […] I was very aware I was on my own. Before that moment I felt entirely safe
>
> *(Stan, 26, Queer/bisexual, Cis man)*

This fear of violence recurred throughout the interviews, time and time again. Not all participants felt fear when wearing outfits that communicated their identities, but many did. The violence people described led them to adopt different ways of dressing and being in the world. Mike participated in the photo diary element of the research. Pictures showed him as a tall man with a large black mohawk,

often wearing black vest tops, black trousers, rings, black nail varnish, and big black boots. In describing a vest top that he felt was on the more feminine side in the course of the photo diary, Mike said that he felt comfortable wearing it to most places, however:

> I think there would be a concern […] of […] possible hostile assumptions around sexuality or around gender nonconformity […] while you want to challenge these things at the same time you also want to play on the safe side and not be involved in any trouble if someone was feeling that they wanted to pick on someone
>
> *(Mike, 36, Bi+, Male)*

Similarly, Stan participated in the photo diary and sent pictures for two weeks of his outfits which were, in his own terms, largely punk/hypermasculine skinhead/skater style. Stan appeared - to my judgment – very masculine, with a beard and a shaved head. However, in the course of the photo diary Stan demonstrated his experimentation with different colours, sometimes wearing pink jumpers, or purple hats. Stan had had a lot of experience with feeling vulnerable as a result of what he wore. When he was 15, a man in his mid-40s had approached Stan to give him a handshake for being brave enough to wear skinny jeans at a time when they were not mainstream. Upon shaking his hand, the older man noticed that Stan was wearing nail varnish, "and he was like 'so are you a faggot then?' and it changed very quickly. Painting nails was a step too far for that man." Stan was intimidated by this older man and his aggressive language, and this was a relatively formative experience in Stan's development. Women felt that they were more able to explore their genders through visual means. In describing her times of going out at any time of night wearing whatever she wanted then Carys reflected on how men or AMAB people experienced the public and gender expression:

> If someone who was read as male wore very girly clothes as in fancy going out girly clothes, a silky dress, high probability of getting beaten up - not 100% but I'd say enough that if they did that frequently enough they'd get assaulted because men get assaulted in public
>
> *(Carys, 34, Bisexual, Female)*

Both men and women recognised the concerns of men who may wear a feminised outfit. Women also referred to how they negotiated their outfit choices based on a wish to avoid sexual harassment and violence. Some women made sure that they were covered up when going outside so they would not draw stares. One woman cut her hair very short before going travelling as she heard that it would be

more difficult for a rapist to grab her by the hair to keep her steady during an attack. These moderations of femininity and masculinity amongst cis people demonstrate the care people took in choosing their expressions. Not all people considered this, but the recurrence of these sorts of statements demonstrated how people perceive their position in public spaces as vulnerable on the basis of their sexuality. A failure to demonstrate an appropriate gender and sexuality could have significant consequences.

When it came to presenting one's plurisexuality, many participants had difficulty in knowing how to do so using traditionally coded masculine and feminine outfits:

> What do bisexuals look like? I don't know. Who knows! I don't know
>
> *(Jacub, 22, Bisexual, Man)*

Participants discussed a range of potential ways to look plurisexual, including cuffing one's jeans, wearing glasses, having a number of badges, cutting one's hair into the 'bisexual bob'[14], or wearing a leather jacket. For many this caused problems, as they wished to be seen as plurisexual:

> The relationship between your identity and how other people see you […] is quite important […] it's validating. I feel seen
>
> *(Alice, 32, Queer/Bisexual, Woman)*

Although this was recurrently important for the majority of participants, the absence of mainstream plurisexual representation, and the exclusion of plurisexuality from homonormative environments meant that the majority of people could not adequately phrase their sexual identities:

> It's not like I'm trying to hide [my sexuality] […] I want to make it obvious but I don't know how to make it obvious
>
> *(Gina, 24, Bisexual, Woman)*

[14] A bisexual bob is a common joke amongst young people depicting a sharply cut bob as being indicative of someone's bisexuality.

Gina was aware that the majority of queer coding relates to gay and lesbian identities, and there was not a way to adequately queer code one's clothes using gendered expressions to highlight a plurisexual identity. In discussing queer-coding, most participants noted the extreme performativity – and to an extent – campness of presentation:

> That whole historically queer - and especially gay - experience of being conscious and affective and performative about everything you do—and everything is a choice, and everything is deliberate, all of the time? I think maybe [for] people who are variations of bi and ace, and more liminal, complicated queer identities, that's dialed up to eleven, because you're not just navigating, 'Am I going to look gay or not?' It's like, how? And if I'm going to look gay, how do I complicate that, or make it weirder in some way?
>
> *(Hyde, 26, Bi Ace, Genderqueer Demiboy)*

As a result of the complications Hyde describes, most people were often misunderstood as gay or lesbian. Due to the ambiguous possibilities for performing plurisexuality, the ambiguously gendered appearance became important, as Jessie described that for them, finding bisexuals could be done through "spotting people who are doing their gender a bit wrong" (Jessie, 44, Bisexual, Female/Genderqueer/Enby). This replicates Daly et al.'s findings which suggest that bisexual people use a chameleonesque adoption of masculine and feminine visual norms to communicate their attraction dependent on the context they were in (Daly, King and Yeadon-Lee, 2018). However, for the majority of participants who chose to represent their plurisexuality through visual means, it is clear that context, spatiality, and safety were core concerns in presenting one's sexuality through gendered means. Although this was the case, the majority of participants strongly desired to present their sexual identities to be visually recognisable whilst also not truly knowing how to present their sexual identities given the lack of plurisexual representation in LGBTQ+ communities and mainstream media representations.

Overall, it is clear that navigating cisnormativity, binary gender roles, monosexism, heteronormativity, and the patriarchy requires a significant degree of skill and consideration. Participants recognised the social roles of men, women, and non binary people as different, and often felt they failed to measure up to what was expected of them. Participants played with gender expression and fashion to communicate plurisexuality, however, sometimes they felt fear of expressing their gender due to potential physical, sexual, or social repercussions. Again, these findings return to an overarching gender ambivalence where gender can be an arena of expression whilst simultaneously a thing which if done wrong can result in violence. Participants were keen to use

gendered clothing to queer code and express their plurisexuality. Gender in this way was a tool of self-expression, and a toy. However, gender was also a point of vulnerability that could create situations that endangered participants at the hands of those who were intolerant.

8.4 Plurisexuals as Gender Ambivalent

This chapter has highlighted how an adapted queer theoretical and methodological framework can benefit the study of gender. Through focusing on lived experience and calling into question gender categories and meanings, this chapter has demonstrated how safety and relations can impact gender identity. Furthermore, through acknowledging the nuances inherent to identification and classification, this chapter has explored the role of gender in daily life for plurisexual people without restricting or siloing experience. Further, in keeping with the emancipatory aims of this thesis, this chapter is part of a concentrated effort to position trans and non binary identities as central voices in interpreting and understanding gender, given the specific spatiality and contextual formation of gender, as Hines' work demonstrates (Hines, 2006b, 2006a, 2010b, 2010a, 2017).

Sexuality and gender are inextricably connected due to the way in which sexuality is premised on the consumption of the other's body in its gendered form as has been noted in other work (See anthology: Williams and Stein, 2002). Plurisexuals suggested that women are to be consumed, men are to dominate, and sex is the undercurrent in much of contemporary culture, similar to arguments put forward by sexuality theorists (Rich, 1980; West and Zimmerman, 1987; Flood, 2008). Consequently, the plurisexual data here suggests here – in keeping with Gilbert, Butler, and many other queer-informed contemporary gender theorists - that gender is the base social structure that dictates much of people's experiences (Butler, 2007; Gilbert, 2009). Experiences change based on intersectional discrimination that results in race, religion, ethnicity, age, and ability impacting further on how a person is understood and treated (Nagel, 2003; Collins, 2006; Esmail *et al.*, 2010).

Chapter 6 detailed the ontological chasm that plurisexuals experience, resulting in a necessary transformation into *Sexual Renegades* where plurisexuals develop their own ontology and epistemology regarding the connections between sexuality and gender. Chapter 7 detailed the way in which relationships are necessarily gendered experiences given the social roles and expectations associated with romancing and sexing different genders. These two separate but connected processes culminate in this chapter to highlight plurisexual gender ambivalence as a result of the conflicting openness to desiring multiple genders and practicing of gender in relationships. In the context of an individual's gender identity, gender is critically unimportant in terms of how they view themselves – they do not care, they play with it, it is of no issue. Simultaneously, it is a significant point of self-expression, necessarily the way in which they may communicate their sexuality through queer coding

femininely or masculinely, and a huge concern as regards safety from violence and relating to others. Gender ambivalence is the moment when plurisexuals reach a point where they have no stake in what gender means, and yet necessarily act out roles relating to the gender binary and relating to cisnormativity for purposes of safety.

This chapter has contributed to understandings of gender based on context, spatiality, and community. This chapter has demonstrated that gender expression can transform and hold different saliences in different time periods, with one's own sense of identity transforming based on external influences. The next chapter will conclude this PhD, reiterating the core argument and direction of this thesis before clarifying the contributions this thesis has made in relation to the wider gender, sexuality, and sociology scholarship.

Conclusion

Understanding Plurisexuality

This thesis has set out to explore the ways in which plurisexual people – those sexually or romantically attracted to more than one gender – experience their sexual identities and gender in their everyday lives. The social context of plurisexuals demonstrates that plurisexuals have a particular experience related to monosexist social dynamics that results in personal, social, and institutional oppression. Given these dynamics, it is important to study plurisexuality apart from broader LGBTQ+ identities to understand the specificity of experience in a monosexist society. In looking at scholarship conducted prior to this PhD, it is clear that this thesis has been a critical intervention given the absence of research into plurisexuality within sexualities scholarship as a whole. Furthermore, within studies that have sought to explore plurisexuality – whether theoretically or empirically – there have been significant absences related to failing to understand the role of the body, gender, and intersectionality in relation to a plurisexual identity. Broadly speaking, it is fair to conclude that the attention paid to plurisexuality in general sexualities scholarship has been minimal. The scholarship that does delve into plurisexuality has done excellent work in analysing a number of issues relevant to plurisexuality, gender, and society more broadly. However, to enable a more significant sociological study into gender dynamics and experiences of sexual identity it has been necessary to develop an adapted queer theoretical framework. The theoretical framework of this thesis was informed by Monro's approach to plurisexuality, and has been expanded to incorporate issues pertinent to plurisexuality. In brief, this theoretical framework has necessitated a revision of queer theory through incorporating a specific emphasis on gender, the body, intersectionality, and lived experience. Given the necessity of focusing on these understudied aspects of plurisexuality, the following research questions were developed:

- How do plurisexuals interpret, interact with, and experience identity, the body, and gender in their lives?

The following sub-questions were formed to elucidate the overarching research question;

- How do plurisexuals interpret and experience their own sexual and gender identities?
- How do plurisexuals' experiences of their own and others' bodies interact with their identities?

To answer these questions briefly, it is clear that the plurisexual experience of sexual identity, the body, and gender, results in a plurisexual relationship dynamic that itself culminates in a gender ambivalence for plurisexual people. The cisheteronormative and monosexist social dynamic that is currently established means that plurisexual people have to carefully navigate identity, gender, and bodies in a biphobic and hostile social system, resulting in a plurisexual epistemology and ontology

that develops apart from mainstream society. This cisheteronormative social structure is the basis of discrimination and oppression for plurisexual people.

The summary of these dynamics requires a three-part explanation. Firstly, the chasm between a monosexist ontology (it is normal to be attracted to exclusively one gender) and a plurisexual ontology (it is normal to be attracted to more than one gender) means that plurisexuals are initially *Sexual Outsiders*, that is, they do not relate to the dominant monosexist social structure. This chasm can only be resolved through developing a plurisexual epistemology, where plurisexuals come to learn that the only way that they can know about gender and sexuality is through trusting in their own feelings and desires against a monosexist opposition. If a plurisexual develops this epistemology, they are able to become a *Sexual Renegade,* who is able to maintain their plurisexual identity in a dominantly monosexist social structure. In this way, plurisexuality is a threat to the dominant monosexist social order. It is important to recognize that *Sexual Renegades* and *Sexual Outsiders* are epistemological and ontological positions that may shift across social contexts, locations, and experiences based on external monosexist pressures that can cause *Renegades* to question their identities once more.

Secondly, when entering into relationships, it is clear that plurisexuals are not able to escape from cisheteronormative dynamics which establish gender roles and expectations in the context of a romantic relationship, whether heteronormative or homonormative. Consequently, plurisexuals act out relationships in different ways based on the gender of their partners. These experiences are evident both in how plurisexuals have sex with different genders, as well as in how plurisexuals construct and feel their own desirability and attractiveness to different genders.

Thirdly, and finally, these two separate but connected aspects of plurisexuality combine to establish a gender ambivalence amongst plurisexuals. Plurisexuals view gender as both critically important and critically unimportant, seen in ways of understanding one's own gender identity, ways of 'being' in public spaces, and through relationship dynamics. Gender is to be played with, to be explored, to be creatively expressed, and yet remains a huge concern in protecting oneself from violence. In essence, plurisexuals have little stake in maintaining a 'stable' gender identity, but necessarily have to act out roles relating to the gender binary and cisnormativity for safety reasons and to relate to and be accepted by others.

In short then, plurisexuals have a specific way of interacting with sexual identity, gender identity, and the body that has long-ranging implications on their ways of relating to other peoples whether they are romantic partners, strangers, family, or any person in between.

Contributions of this thesis to academia

The contributions of this thesis to scholarship are far ranging. Theoretically, this thesis has helped further develop an everyday queer theoretical approach, continuing the interventions of Hines and Roseneil in this sociological and theoretical field (Roseneil, 2000; Hines, 2006a, 2006b, 2010a). Through taking seriously the body, gender, and identity from a queer theoretical perspective, this everyday queer theoretical approach has been elaborated on in this thesis. Further, the emphasis on the body, lived experience, and the physicality of desire and romance has further developed theoretical concepts relating to the body, including embodiment theory and corporeal realism. Through bringing further insight into the sexed and gendered dimensions of the body in society, whether in romantic relationships or community relationships, this work has helped further develop perspectives – such as in the examples of Shilling, Ahmed, and Stacey - that emphasis the phenomenological, communicative, and social aspects of embodiment (Shilling, 1993; Ahmed and Stacey, 2001). This thesis has also taken seriously the notion of plurisexuality, centring plurisexuality as a core investigation within this work to reframe the omission, derision, or absorption plurisexual identities often encounter in the field of sexuality studies (Monro, Hines and Osborne, 2017). Finally, the theoretical elaboration of plurisexuals as *Sexual Renegades* and *Sexual Outsiders* is a novel contribution to understanding plurisexual experiences that develops on other scholarship in this area. The theory of gender ambivalence relevant to plurisexuality also contributes to theories around cisheteronormativity and gender roles, highlighting the interaction between the individual and the social structure, and what may be at stake in understanding these issues.

Empirically, this work has worked to incorporate different experiences of plurisexuality that are often not heard, such as the perspectives of cis men, of non binary people, of trans people, of BAME people, of international people, and of people from different class backgrounds. This sampling approach is much needed in future work that explores plurisexuality given the dearth of empirical data relating to people who are not white, middle-class, cis women.

Methodologically, this research has used queer feminist methods and helped develop an approach that centres participant experiences and wellbeing throughout the study. The emphasis on reflexivity and reciprocality has gone some way to developing an understanding of what it means to be/do LGBT research, a topic which has been expanded on in other publications (Nelson, 2020). Finally, the inclusion of my own voice throughout this PhD has contributed to the development of an analytic autoethnography which both reflects the positionality of myself as a researcher, and also contextualises these experiences in the broader context of a cisheteronormative social dynamic to illustrate useful findings and connections between the research study and my personal experiences.

Contributions of this thesis to non-academic life

I would be remiss to conclude this thesis with only academic contributions. I have drawn together a Plurisexual Manifesto of sorts, with recommendations for policy-makers, inclusive charity work, and inclusive activism. These points, developed from the research conclusions of this thesis, are in the form of recommendations for those working in a variety of fields, from healthcare to law-making. I hope that these summary points, based on the research of this study, may chime with the way in which people currently construct interventions and policies to establish a more inclusive society that can incorporate plurisexuality to a higher extent than currently:

THE PLURISEXUAL MANIFESTO

1. Identities are temporal and changeable
2. Attraction changes over time and space
3. Sexual acts are not required to demonstrate one's sexual identity
4. Labels can be helpful in creating communities and positioning oneself in a political sense. However, labels are also complicated, messy, and cannot express the complexity of desire and sex
5. Representation matters – and plurisexuals exist.
6. Understand that homonormative and heteronormative ideals impact on relationships
7. Deprioritise the 'relationship escalator' so that people are better able to question and discuss what they want
8. Radically rethink what it means to have sex, and what acts are appropriate with which genitalia
9. Radically rethink relationship roles across lines which do not take into account gender
10. Understand and emphasise the difference between sexual and romantic relationships
11. Open up gender categories to recognise the spectrum of possible identities, as well as the fact that some people's gender identities are fluid and changeable
12. Avoid making assumptions around people's gender identities to better accommodate a flexible view of what identifying as a particular gender has to mean for us
13. Educate ourselves on appropriate language usage, including language used in describing relationships
14. Understand and recognise cisnormative and monosexist assumptions around femininity and masculinity
15. Degrade the primacy of recognising identities based on visually determined ascribed characteristics

Limitations and Future Research

There have, of course, been limitations to this study. Firstly, although sampling was carefully considered to enable a diverse sample of people to take part in this research, I remain dissatisfied with the racial diversity of the sample, and with the number of trans people who took part in this study. These critical voices have been highlighted throughout this thesis, yet more participants from these samples may have provided more nuance to the conclusions of this thesis. Further, the dearth of plurisexual-specific literature in developing this study was a limitation. Although this gave me the opportunity to develop this as a relatively understudied area of research, often informed by my hunches as an insider-researcher, it would have been helpful to have further research to lean on in drawing conclusions around this work. This thesis' key intervention is an attempt to call for more research into plurisexuality, given the way plurisexuality can inform our understandings of sexuality and gender. Yet, it would have been helpful to have had more literature on the topic prior to entering into this field. My cultural bias as a bisexual non binary person has definitely had an impact on this research, both in terms of direction and conclusion. Although this means that there is a clear bias in this study, I also believe that this has motivated me to be highly invested in creating research that is both an accurate representation of plurisexual experiences, and creating research that is beneficial useful to the plurisexual community, the wider LGBTQ+ community, and feminism and gender studies more broadly.

With these limitations in mind, there is a clear direction for further research in this area. Firstly, there is scope for a stronger interrogation of plurisexuality with a more diverse sample. Additionally, developing any further sociological empirical research on plurisexuality will be extremely useful in strengthening this area of scholarship. Developing research focusing on sexual practices and formats (i.e. polyamory, kink) would also be interesting to explore the salience of these different practices in comparison to sexual identities. Research is already being conducted in this field, but it may be interesting to explore these aspects of sexual relationships and contrast them against the salience of identity to see where inclusive policies may best be oriented. Plurisexual representation emerged again and again throughout this study as a point of conversation for the participants, and so exploring how a community identity could be established through online resources and social media would also be an important research path to continue this work. More critically, future research into sexuality and gender should centre trans and non binary voices, using theoretical frameworks that incorporate queer theoretical perspectives on the limitations of categories and the fluidity of identities. The necessity for this work is evident in the UK given the rife transphobia both within and outside of academia. However, approaching and understanding gender diversity is critical in international contexts, too, given the specificity of gender experiences based on community and

cultural contexts. Finally, I recommend that within the field of sexuality studies more broadly, there needs to be a refocus on the importance of gender and other axes of oppression, and a particular continued focus on how plurisexuals *do* gender and sexuality in relation to others as opposed to in their individual lives.

Final Thoughts

Before concluding this thesis, I would like to emphasise the importance of centering trans and non binary people in future research in gender where possible. Trans and non binary people experience high rates of abuse, oppression and discrimination on the basis of their identities and expression. The gender binary demonstrably limits people's experiences and expressions, whether cis or trans. However, for non binary people, this binary division erases them entirely. As a people who cannot exist, non binary people live in a disjunctured society where their very existence is unnoticed and unintelligible, leaving them adrift without legal rights, social recognition, or institutional power. As they walk in the world, sometimes combining feminine and masculine visual elements, they are left vulnerable to others' castigation and bullying. Travis Alabanza, a notable Bristolian poet and performer, recently wrote and performed a groundbreakingly popular solo theatre show entitled *Burgerz* that highlighted Alabanza's experience of walking along London Bridge and having a burger thrown at them. Everyone saw, and no one did anything but stare, turn away, or sneer. As a non binary person, Alabanza's production highlighted the discomforting, violent environment on buses, trains, streets, clubs, and lunchbreaks with no intervention from others, whilst also critiquing the colonial system of gender that is racist, homophobic, and transphobic. As demonstrated, all participants referred to the implicit control of the gender binary, that greatly impacted their lives and expressions whether cis, trans, or non binary. The social, institutional, and legal policing of these genders meant that people experienced sexism, invisibility, and discrimination on the basis of their gender.

Beyond issues concerning the gender binary, cisnormativity denies trans people a discrimination-free existence. Trans identities are pathologised, medicalised, and moved along a treatment pathway (Pearce, 2018). In May 2019, the World Health Organisation moved from classifying trans health issues as mental and behavioural disorders, to falling under sexual health (*BBC News*, 2019). This comes after decades of interpreting trans health issues as related to mental illness. The medicalisation of trans identities links to concerns of trans people as sick, in a phase, or in some way perverted or twisted. Whilst trans people typically have to wait 3 months to two years to receive hormones before then later receiving surgery, cis women can access labiaplasties, breast augmentations, and vaginal rejuvenation surgeries without undergoing a similarly taxing psychological and behavioural assessment. This broad difference applies differently to NHS healthcare and private healthcare, but the principles remain similar in that trans and non binary gender affirming processes

are considered more life-altering and serious. This distinction suggests that it is appropriate for women to maintain an attractive vulva through whatever means necessary, whilst trans or non binary people who wish to receive gender affirming surgery that can greatly decrease dysphoria are unable to access it as easily. Maintaining a status quo of attractive cisnormativity becomes of prime importance.

Of course, as discussed, these issues further link to heteronormativity. Butler's sex-gender-desire continuum and the bigender social structure mean that heteronormativity is expected and desired. Many participants experienced shame about their identities at points in their lives related to the fact that their sexual identity did not match their gender identity in a heteronormative and cis gender system. Furthermore, the combination of homonormativity and monosexism meant that participants felt difficulties in identifying broadly as plurisexual. As demonstrated, participants used their bodies to attempt to highlight their sexualities through an embodied performance of self. Through mixing masculine and feminine attributes and presenting their gender expression differently, participants felt that they revealed their gender and sexuality as authentically as possible through visual means that were often misunderstood by mainstream cis heterosexual people and by homonormative LGBTQ+ people. This emphasises the contribution of this work, which demonstrates how the body matters over time and how intersectionality can be incorporated with queer theory, as well as how a sociological perspective can incorporate an adapted queer theoretical approach.

In brief, cisheteronormativity, homonormativity, and monosexism are the ills here. A move to deconstruct and subvert these social dynamics will enable plurisexuals – regardless of gender identity – to live more freely, without fear of violence, oppression, or discrimination.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Phase 1 Information Sheet

Rosie Nelson
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30th March 2018

Information Sheet for Phase I of *Nonmonosexual Identities: Understanding the Role of the Body, Gender, and Temporality.*

Dear Participant,

Thank you for your interest in taking part of this study, which forms the basis for a PhD project conducted by Rosie Nelson at the University of Bristol. Before you agree to take part, it is important for you to understand why this research is being done, and what it will involve. Please take the time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with friends and family if you like. If you have any questions concerning the details in this information sheet, please contact the researcher listed at the end of this information sheet. Thank you for reading this.

What is this study about?

This study is intended to explore participant's experiences of their own sexuality, both in terms of how they have explored their sexualities, and in terms of how their gender expression has developed over time in relation to their sexualities.

To explore this, the researcher is interviewing 25-30 people who are romantically or sexually interested in more than one gender. You may wish to know that the researcher involved in this project identifies as a queer/bisexual ciswoman.

Why have I been chosen?

You have been asked to take part as you identify as someone romantically or sexually attracted to more than one gender. You have lived in the United Kingdom for at least two years within the last ten years.

Although the term 'nonmonosexual' is being used in the title of this research, it is understood you may identify in other ways including pansexual, bisexual, queer, homoflexible, heteroflexible+++ – 'nonmonosexual' is being used as an umbrella term for the purpose of communicating the research to those outside of the LGBT community.

Do I have to take part?

You do not have to take part in this research. Your participation is entirely voluntary. Furthermore, if you choose to take part and then change your mind at any point, then you can withdraw your consent to participate at any time.

What will happen to me if I take part?

If you choose to take part, the researcher will arrange to interview you in person at a time and location convenient to you. The interview will take approximately 1-2 hours and will be audio-recorded.

What do I have to do?

If you would like to take part in this research, please contact the researcher via the contact details listed at the end of this information sheet.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

The questions involved in the course of the interview will be intensive and in-depth. The researcher will ask questions relating to your 'coming-out' story, your relationship history, and the way in which you've experienced feelings of community and belonging. The interview may focus around gender expression, and the way in which that may have changed over time. Due to the content of the interviews, you may become stressed or anxious in retelling your experiences. After the interview, the researcher will provide you with a list of resources which can aid you in exploring any of the issues discussed at interview.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

There may be some personal benefit in taking part in being able to tell one's story to the researcher. However, the larger benefit will be a contribution to the study of bisexuality and nonmonosexuality, which currently is very underrepresented and understudied within academia.

Research will be shared with the participants of the study. It is hoped that the research may be able to create guidelines that can inform LGBT organisation best practice to be more inclusive of those sexually or romantically interested in more than one gender.

Will my taking part in this project be kept confidential?

Your participation in the project will be kept confidential. None of your personal details (address, contact details) will appear in any publications related to this research. There is an option to use a different name when being quoted in publications, or to use your own name if you would like to be recognised for your contribution in the research.

The only person who will know your name, address, and contact details will be the interviewing researcher. If you are deemed to be at risk to yourself and others based on the content of the interview, the researcher may be obliged to disclose your identity.

Will I be recorded, and how will the recorded media be used?

Interviews will be audio-recorded. The recorded audio files will be transferred to a password protected account at the University of Bristol. The original audio files will be deleted from the recording device. The audio file will then be transcribed and anonymised. You will be sent a copy of the transcript to review and amend as you wish. If no changes are sent to the researcher within two weeks, the transcript will be assumed to be acceptable, and will be analysed.

What will happen to the results of the research project?

The interviews will be analysed for a PhD project. It is likely that quotes from the interviews will form the basis of future publications, including web pages, social media, policy guidelines, reports, and journal articles.

Who is organising the research?

This project is being organised and conducted by ESRC-funded PhD Researcher Rosie Nelson from the Sociology department at the University of Bristol. The study has been subject to an ethical review process in line with University of Bristol guidance.

Who can I contact for further information?

Rosie Nelson

SPAIS, 11 Priory Road, Bristol BS8 1TY.

Rosie.Nelson@bristol.ac.uk

Thank you for taking part in this research. If you would like to consent to taking part in this research, or you would like to receive further information, please contact Rosie Nelson via the e-mail address above.

Appendix 2: Phase 1 Consent Form

Rosie Nelson
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Rosie.Nelson@bristol.ac.uk
30th March 2018

Consent Form for Phase I *Nonmonosexual Identities: Understanding the Role of the Body, Gender, and Temporality.*

Please tick the appropriate boxes

I confirm that I am 18 years of age or above ☐

I have read and understood the project information sheet dated 30/03/18. ☐

I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the project. ☐

I agree to take part in the project. Taking part in the project will include being interviewed and audio recorded. ☐

I understand that my taking part is voluntary; I can withdraw from the study at any time and I will not be asked any questions about why I no longer want to take part. ☐

Select only one of the next two options:
I would like my name used where what I have said or written as part of this study will be used in reports, publications and other research outputs so that anything I have contributed to this project can be recognised. ☐

I do not want my name used in this project. ☐

I understand my personal details such as phone number and address will not be revealed to people outside the project. ☐

I understand that my words may be quoted in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs but my name will not be used unless I requested it above. ☐

I understand that the University of Bristol will use the data I provide for no purpose other than research. ☐

________________________	________________	________
Name of Participant	Signature	Date
________________________	________________	________
Name of Researcher	Signature	Date

Appendix 3: Demographic Information Form

Rosie Nelson
Rosie.Nelson@bristol.ac.uk
14th April 2018

Demographic Questionnaire for Phase I of *Nonmonosexual Identities: Understanding the Role of the Body, Gender, and Temporality.*

What is your gender identity?

What is your sexual identity?

What is your current relationship status?

How old are you?

What is your nationality?

How long have you lived in the UK in total?

What is your ethnicity?

What is your class background?

What is the highest level of education you attained?

What is your current occupation?

Do you have a known disability (mental health/physical)?

Appendix 4: Phase 1 Interview Schedule

Rosie Nelson
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14th April 2018

Questionnaire for Phase I of *Nonmonosexual Identities: Understanding the Role of the Body, Gender, and Temporality.*

WARM UP

How did you hear about this research and why did you choose to take part in this research?

SEXUAL IDENTITY & COMMUNITY

Could you describe your sexual identity to me?

Are you publically 'out' regarding your sexual identity?

Could you tell me about your experiences of coming out? Either one specific time, or multiple?

Do you feel that it is important to have a community to talk about your sexual identity with? Are you involved in bisexual or LGBT groups? Why?

Has your view of your own sexual identity ever changed over time?

GENDER IDENTITY

Could you describe your gender identity to me?

Have you ever had to 'come out' regarding your gender identity?

HISTORICAL RELATIONSHIPS

I am interested in how your relationships or sexual encounters may be different based on the gender of your partner. Do you feel that gender affects relationships? How?

Do you feel that your own gender identity, or the way in which you dress or do your hair, changes depending on the gender of your partner?

Have you felt that your behaviour has changed in the context of being in relationships or connections with different genders?

In the context of any serious relationships that you may have had, have your feelings about your potential future together changed based on the gender of the person that you were seeing?

Have these gender changes / relationship dynamics changed over time from when you first started dating different genders?

FASHION AND EMBODIMENT

In general, do you feel that you dress in a 'bisexual' way to express your sexuality, or do you feel that there is a 'bisexual' way of being?

Are you conscious about the way in which you dress, do make-up or hair, or wear specific outfits to specific places?

What importance does this have for you on a daily basis?

Has this changed over time from when you were first exploring your identity to now?

CONCLUSIONS

How important is your sexual identity to your gender identity? Has this always been the case?

How important are your sexual identities and gender identities in everyday life? Has this always been the case?

Is there anything you would like to tell me about your relationship to your body, to your gender, or to your sexual identity over time?

Is there anything else you would like this interview to reflect, or something particular that you would like to tell me about your experiences?

Appendix 5: Participant Resource Sheet

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30th March 2018

Resource Sheet for Phase I *Nonmonosexual Identities: Understanding the Role of the Body, Gender, and Temporality.*

Thank you for participating in the research project. We are likely to have discussed a lot surrounding your identity and your life, and this may have brought up a number of things which you wish to explore further. Below is a list of resources which may be of interest to you, and this is in no way exhaustive, but it may be a good place to begin thinking about anything that might have come up. If you have any suggestions of other resources I could include for future participants, please send them via e-mail to Rosie.Nelson@bristol.ac.uk.

As we discussed, I will message you in a few days to see how you are and whether there is anything else that you might want to add to the interview. I will also transcribe the interview and send it back to you so that you can check that you're happy with what we spoke about, whether there is anything you want to remove, or whether you want to remove your interview from the project entirely. Once I send it to you I will wait one week before beginning to analyse it as, if you don't get in contact, I'll assume that you're happy for me to continue with this.

Culture (podcasts, movies, books, Twitter)

- Bi Community News – a bimonthly newsletter/magazine http://www.bicommunitynews.co.uk/
- BiCon – a bisexual convention/conference https://bicon.org.uk/
- The BiCast Podcast https://thebicast.org/
- BBC World Service Documentary: Being Bisexual http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p059lylf
- By the Bi – a podcast about bisexuality/swinger community/open relationships/BDSM https://player.fm/series/by-the-bi-1523776
- BiPride UK https://biprideuk.org/
- Atomic Blonde – a movie with a bisexual lead
- Brokeback Mountain – a movie that has bisexual behaviour
- The Rocky Horror Picture Show – cult classic with bisexual behaviour
- Frida – a movie about famously bisexual Frida Kahlo
- Orlando by Virginia Woolf – bisexual themes in literature
- Bi: Notes for a Bisexual Revolution by Shiri Eisner – nonfiction book on bisexuality
- The Well of Loneliness by Radclyffe Hall – could be read as bisexual!
- The Color Purple by Alice Walker
- Twitter @bisexualbooks https://twitter.com/BisexualBooks
- Twitter @bifamilies https://twitter.com/BiFamilies
- Twitter @criticallyq https://twitter.com/CriticallyQ
- Twitter @stillbisexual https://twitter.com/StillBisexual

- Twitter @applewriter https://twitter.com/applewriter
- Twitter @bitopiamagazine https://twitter.com/BitopiaMagazine
- Twitter @autostraddle https://twitter.com/autostraddle
- Twitter @bidotorg https://twitter.com/BiDotOrg
- Twitter @robynochs https://twitter.com/robynochs
- Twitter @we_are_biscuit https://twitter.com/we_are_biscuit
- Twitter @elielcruz https://twitter.com/elielcruz
- The Bisexual Index http://www.bisexualindex.org.uk/
- The Queerness Magazine https://thequeerness.com/
- Qwearfashion http://www.qwearfashion.com/

Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault

- National Domestic Violence Helpline http://www.nationaldomesticviolencehelpline.org.uk/
- Signs of Domestic Violence and Abuse https://www.nhs.uk/livewell/abuse/pages/domestic-violence-help.aspx
- Domestic Violence and Abuse https://www.gov.uk/report-domestic-abuse
- GALOP (for LGBT domestic violence and abuse) http://www.galop.org.uk/
- Men's Advice line (for domestic abuse) http://www.mensadviceline.org.uk/
- Refuge https://www.refuge.org.uk/
- Emergency Shelter Guidance for Women https://england.shelter.org.uk/housing_advice/homelessness/temporary_housing_if_youre_homeless/refuges_if_youre_a_woman_suffering_from_domestic_abuse
- Emergency Shelter Guidance (not gender specific) http://england.shelter.org.uk/housing_advice/homelessness/rules/emergency_housing_if_you_are_homeless

Physical and Mental Health

- Samaritans Tel: 116123
- The Mix (for under 25s) http://www.themix.org.uk/get-support
- Mind InfoLine https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/helplines/
- NHS Mental Health https://www.nhs.uk/livewell/mentalhealth/Pages/Mentalhealthhome.aspx
- NHS Overcoming Addiction https://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/Addiction/Pages/addictionhome.aspx
- Mind Addiction and Dependency https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/guides-to-support-and-services/addiction-and-dependency/#.Wt8x224vyUk

Gender Resources

- Gendered Intelligence http://genderedintelligence.co.uk/

- NHS Transgender Health https://www.nhs.uk/livewell/transhealth/Pages/Transhealthhome.aspx
- UK Trans Info http://uktrans.info/
- Mermaids UK http://www.mermaidsuk.org.uk/
- Nonbinary Inclusion Project http://nonbinary.co.uk/
- Beyond the Binary magazine http://beyondthebinary.co.uk/
- Twitter @allabouttrans https://twitter.com/AllAboutTrans
- Twitter @wipetransphobia https://twitter.com/WipeTransphobia
- Twitter @transmediawatch https://twitter.com/TransMediaWatch
- Twitter @scottishtrans https://twitter.com/ScottishTrans
- Twitter @TransArchives https://twitter.com/TransArchives

National Organisations

- Stonewall https://www.stonewall.org.uk/
- Twitter @LGBTHistoryScot https://twitter.com/LGBTHistoryScot
- Intersex UK https://www.facebook.com/intersexuk/
- LGBT Foundation https://lgbt.foundation/

Appendix 6: Phase 2 Information Sheet

Rosie Nelson
SPAIS
11 Priory Road
Bristol
BS8 1TY
Rosie.Nelson@bristol.ac.uk
30th March 2018

Information Sheet for Phase II of *Nonmonosexual Identities: Understanding the Role of the Body, Gender, and Temporality.*

Dear Participant,

Thank you for your interest in taking part of this study, which forms the basis for a PhD project conducted by Rosie Nelson at the University of Bristol. You have already taken part in Phase I and been interviewed, and this information sheet will introduce Phase II of the study to you. Before you agree to take part, it is important for you to understand why this research is being done, and what it will involve. Please take the time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with friends and family if you like. If you have any questions concerning the details in this information sheet, please contact the researcher listed at the end of this information sheet. Thank you for reading this.

What is this study about?

As with Phase I, this phase of the study is intended to explore participant's experiences of their own sexuality, both in terms of how they have explored their sexualities, and in terms of how their gender expression has developed over time in relation to their sexualities. As part of Phase I, the researcher is interviewing 25-30 people.

However, for Phase II, the stage for which you're being asked to participate, the researcher is recruiting 8-10 people. These people will keep a photo diary for two weeks, taking pictures of their outfits, fashion tastes, make-up tastes, or clothes in shops that they find interesting. After this, they will be interviewed by the researcher once more to talk about the photos they took.

Why have I been chosen?

You have been asked to take part as you qualified for Phase I of the study, being nonmonosexual and having lived in the UK for the past two years. You have been asked to take part in this next phase of study as an opportunity to continue to engage in this research.

Do I have to take part?

You do not have to take part in this research. Your participation is entirely voluntary. Furthermore, if you choose to take part and then change your mind at any point, then you can withdraw your consent to participate at any time.

What will happen to me if I take part?

If you choose to take part, the researcher will ask you to begin to take pictures of things for two weeks. The researcher is interested in what you wear, to which spaces. The researcher is also interested in any clothes or make-up that you like the look of in shops, adverts, or amongst

friends. When you take the pictures, you can either e-mail them directly to the researcher at Rosie.Nelson@bristol.ac.uk or send them via Whatsapp directly to the researcher. After the two-week photo-diary period, the researcher will invite you to interview at a time and location convenient to you. The interview will be audio-recorded.

What do I have to do?

If you would like to take part in this research, please contact the researcher via the contact details listed at the end of this information sheet.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

Due to the need to send the photos when possible, it's possible that taking part in the photo-diary element of this study will be slightly more time-consuming than the original interview. You will need to take photos and send them to the researcher whenever you feel you have a particularly strong feeling about what you're wearing, or whenever you're going to a location or event that is important to you. If the researcher does not hear from you for three days, she will contact you via e-mail, text, or phone to ask you whether you still want to take part in the research, and remind you to send photos if so. Emailing photos or sending photos via Whatsapp should be a relatively quick procedure, but it will be something to think about for the next two weeks.

Similar to the first phase of study, the questions involved in the follow-up interview will be intensive and in-depth. The researcher will ask questions relating to your outfits, choices, and reasons for expressing yourself in that way when you went to the various events or locations you went to. The interviewer will ask you to reflect on how you view your style, and how that affects your interactions with others in different spaces. Due to the content of the interviews, you may become stressed or anxious in retelling your experiences. After the interview, the researcher will provide you with a list of resources which can aid you in exploring any of the issues discussed at interview.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

There may be some personal benefit in taking part in being able to tell one's story to the researcher. However, the larger benefit will be a contribution to the study of bisexuality and nonmonosexuality, which currently is very underrepresented and understudied within academia.

Research will be shared with the participants of the study. It is hoped that the research may be able to create guidelines that can inform LGBT organisation best practice to be more inclusive of those sexually or romantically interested in more than one gender.

Will my taking part in this project be kept confidential?

Your participation in the project will be kept confidential. None of your personal details (address, contact details) will appear in any publications related to this research. There is an option to use a different name when being quoted in publications, or to use your own name if you would like to be recognised for your contribution in the research.

The only person who will know your name, address, and contact details will be the interviewing researcher. If you are deemed to be at risk to yourself and others based on the content of the interview, the researcher may be obliged to disclose your identity.

Any photos taken in this research will not be used for publication, or seen by anyone other than the researcher.

Will I be recorded, and how will the recorded media be used?

Interviews will be audio-recorded. The recorded audio files will be transferred to a password protected account at the University of Bristol. The original audio files will be deleted from the recording device. The audio file will then be transcribed and anonymised. You will be sent a copy of the transcript to review and amend as you wish. If no changes are sent to the researcher within two weeks, the transcript will be assumed to be acceptable, and will be analysed.

The photographs will be kept on a secure server on a University of Bristol computer. No one will have access to these beyond the researcher. The original emails or Whatsapp messages in which you attached the photographs will be deleted from the researchers' inbox/phone as soon as the pictures have been transferred to the secure server. If you do not complete the photo diary, the pictures will still be included in the analysis of results, unless you specify otherwise.

What will happen to the results of the research project?

The interviews will be analysed for a PhD project. It is likely that quotes from the interviews will form the basis of future publications, including web pages, social media, policy guidelines, reports, and journal articles. No photographs will be used in publications or communications about this research.

Who is organising the research?

This project is being organised and conducted by ESRC-funded PhD Researcher Rosie Nelson from the Sociology department at the University of Bristol. The study has been subject to an ethical review process in line with University of Bristol guidance.

Who can I contact for further information?

Rosie Nelson

SPAIS, 11 Priory Road, Bristol BS8 1TY.

Rosie.Nelson@bristol.ac.uk

Thank you for taking part in this research. If you would like to consent to taking part in this research, or you would like to receive further information, please contact Rosie Nelson via the e-mail address above.

Appendix 7: Phase 2 Consent Form

Rosie Nelson
SPAIS
11 Priory Road
Bristol
BS8 1TY
Rosie.Nelson@bristol.ac.uk
30th March 2018

Consent Form for Phase II *Nonmonosexual Identities: Understanding the Role of the Body, Gender, and Temporality.*

Please tick the appropriate boxes

I confirm that I am 18 years of age or above ☐

I have read and understood the project information sheet dated 30/03/2018. ☐

I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the project. ☐

I agree to take part in the project. Taking part in the project will include being interviewed and audio recorded, and sending photographs to the researcher. ☐

I understand that my taking part is voluntary; I can withdraw from the study at any time and I will not be asked any questions about why I no longer want to take part. ☐

Select only one of the next two options:
I would like my name used where what I have said or written as part of this study will be used in reports, publications and other research outputs so that anything I have contributed to this project can be recognised. ☐

I do not want my name used in this project. ☐

I understand my personal details such as phone number and address will not be revealed to people outside the project. ☐

I understand that my words may be quoted in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs but my name will not be used unless I requested it above. The photos will not be shown to anyone except the researcher. ☐

I understand that the University of Bristol will use the data I provide for no purpose other than research. ☐

____________________	______________	_______
Name of Participant	Signature	Date
Name of Researcher	Signature	Date

Appendix 8: Phase 2 Interview Schedule

Rosie Nelson
Rosie.Nelson@bristol.ac.uk
11th June 2018

Questionnaire for Phase II of *Nonmonosexual Identities: Understanding the Role of the Body, Gender, and Temporality.*

WARM UP

How did you find taking part in the photo diary?

PHOTO DIARY SPECIFIC

Could you describe each picture to me?

- Where were you going?
- How did you feel about your outfit and appearance that day?
- Were you specifically trying to communicate anything with your outfit?
- Do you feel your outfit communicated your sexuality or gender at all?
- Do you feel your outfit affected the way you related to people in the situation you were entering into?

Did you think about these things before we spoke about it, or do you think that you're only thinking these things because we're talking about it now?

PHOTO DIARY GENERAL AND CONCLUSIONS

In general, do you feel that you showed me anything particular about your fashion and taste through this photo diary?

In general, how important would you say the way you dress affects your experience in different spaces?

Is there anything else you would like to say about your experience of taking part in the photo diary and how it relates to your sexuality and gender identity?