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Negotiating Demisexual Identities: Brazilian Women's Narratives on Demisexuality

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August 2021

Gemma Erasmus Mundus Master's Degree in Women's and Gender Studies

With the support of the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union

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Signature

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Universidad de Oviedo
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Abstract

Demisexuality is one of the subset categories on the asexual spectrum (also called the "gray area" − a continuum that includes diverse identities based on varied levels of sexual attraction). Demisexuality is defined by Demisexuality.org as "a sexual orientation in which someone feels sexual attraction only to people with whom they have an emotional bond." (Demisexuality Resource Center, n.d.) Since no articles dealing specifically with demisexuality can be found in the main academic repositories, it could be said that there is a lack of research on the discourses that construct the sexuality of people who identify with this category. Moreover, although the demisexual community seeks to dissociate itself from an image of sexual conservatism, an association is oftentimes traced between this sexual identity and the set of sexual expectations that is traditionally imposed upon women. Thus, drawing on a non-essentialist understanding of sexual identities/subjectivities and on a qualitative interpretive approach to knowledge production, I conducted in-depth semi-structured individual interviews with nine Brazilian women who identify as demisexuals in order to investigate how they discursively construct their (demi)sexualities. Based on these interviews, in the thesis I reflect upon the following questions: What role do gender and sexuality play in the lived experience of demisexuality? How do demisexual people construct meanings of gender and sexuality in their narratives about their demisexual identification?

Key words: Demisexuality, asexuality, sexual identity, Brazilian women

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Setting the Grounds

Introduction

Demisexuality is one of the subset categories on the asexual spectrum, also called the "gray area" − a continuum that includes diverse identities based on varied levels of sexual attraction. The creation of the term is attributed to The Asexual Visibility and Education Network (AVEN), the world's largest online asexual community. While asexuality can be defined as a combination of lack of sexual attraction and the subject's identification as asexual (CL DeLuzio Chasin 2013), according to one of the most prominent sites devoted to demisexuality, the latter denotes "a sexual orientation in which someone feels sexual attraction only to people with whom they have an emotional bond." Additionally, the webpage claims that "most demisexuals feel sexual attraction rarely compared to the general population, and some have little to no interest in sexual activity" (Demisexuality Resource Center, n.d.).

The above-cited definitions oftentimes lead to the misconception that demisexuality implies a choice to have sex exclusively after marriage or to be celibate until "true love" appears. Celibacy is frequently related to opting out of a sex life for various personal reasons, an understanding that takes for granted the idea that sexuality is an essential experience for all human beings. Demisexuality, on the other hand, is deemed by the asexual community to be unrelated to self-deprivation, being rather a part of one's sexual identity.

Demisexuality is also widely considered part of the asexual spectrum/umbrella. If we exclude "pure" asexuality and allosexuality[1] from this spectrum, what remains is the "gray area", also called the Ace umbrella (Brotto and Yule 2017). This area is described to include demisexual and graysexual people, although there can also be found references to semisexual, asexual-ish, sexual-ish and other individuals.

It is also common that definitions for demisexuality add the ideas of "psychological" and "intellectual" bond next to "emotional" when describing the connection required. In online forums, it is possible to notice that some demisexuals report feeling sexual attraction rarely. Others report establishing bonds more easily, thus feeling sexual attraction more frequently. Therefore, since graysexual is an umbrella term that encompasses people with diverse experiences, which include "hav[ing] had some semblance of sexuality that's far lower than

[1] Asexual communities borrowed Sedgwick's (1993) use of the term "alloerotic" and proposed the term *allosexual* to classify people whose erotic expression is directed towards other people (Przybylo 2019).

almost all other people who identify as sexual" and/or feeling sexual attraction "only under specific circumstances" (AVEN 2021), it sometimes overlaps with the definition of demisexuality. However, the terms demisexual and demisexuality have gained more prominence online than graysexual[2]/graysexuality.

Moreover, people on the asexual/graysexual spectrum often make a distinction between sexual and romantic orientations. Thus, for instance, a woman who is attracted to women and who identifies as demisexual may consider herself a homoromantic demisexual and a person who feels neither sexual nor romantic attraction may identify as an aromantic asexual. Additionally, people who are not within the asexual spectrum are named allosexuals.

The invention of the term demisexual is commonly attributed to an AVEN user, who proposed it in a 2006 forum (The Guardian 2019).[3] Nevertheless, there is still no research that supports this assumption. The user in question describes "sexual" people as experiencing both primary sexual attraction (based on physical attributes) and secondary sexual attraction (based on emotional connection) and asexual people as experiencing neither. Subsequently, they propose "demisexual" as a term to identify those who only experience secondary attraction. Regardless of its origin, derivatives of this expression can be found in several languages.[4]

When searching for literature on demisexuality, I found a myriad blog posts and magazine articles on the subject (both in English and in Brazilian Portuguese), but no academic literature dealing specifically with this identity. Searches on databases of theses and dissertations (within and outside of Brazil) found several works on asexuality (most of which limit themselves to briefly explaining what the gray area is), but none specifically on demisexuality. The same tendency can be observed in academic scholarship. Therefore, although demisexuality is considered an asexual identity, the growing literature on asexuality focuses on the experiences of those who identify as asexuals, which leaves the broader gray area of asexuality largely unexplored.

It is possible to affirm that demisexuality is part of the new taxonomy of sexual identities, categories and labels that have been established in the past decade (Cover, 2018). Although the emergence of these categories is commonly associated with the establishment of

[2] Also known as gra(e)y-sexual, gra(e)y-ace or gra(e)y-A.

[3] The thread in which the term supposedly first appears is called "Asexual Sex" and can be found on https://www.asexuality.org/en/topic/14000-asexual-sex/#entry375635 (accessed May 07, 2021).

4 A few examples are: demissexualidade (Brazilian Portuguese), demiseksualiteit (Dutch), demisexualité (French), demisexualität (German), demisexualitás (Hungarian), demisessualità (Italian), デミセクシュアル性 (demisekushuaru-sei,demisexual in Japanese) Демисексуальность (demiseksual'nost', Russian), demisexualita (Slovak), demisexualidad (Spanish).

strong digital cultures, the necessity of understanding/categorizing who we are by means of sexual investigations and classifications has been described as part of Western societies since at least the seventeenth century (Foucault 1978). As Michel Foucault theorizes, social institutions have produced a discursive proliferation of sexualities (particularly, of peripheral, unorthodox ones), which has simultaneously produced a "multiplication of pleasure and [an] optimization of the power that controls it" (1978, 48). To better explain, rather than being sexually repressed, individuals have been incited to speak about sexuality within regulated institutional practices, thus producing not only the multiplication of sexualities, but also their rigidification through their extensive categorization (Kurylo 2017). As will be discussed in more detail in chapter one, Foucault also shows how these processes have contributed to the creation of the idea that individuals have a sexual essence that needs to be uncovered.

In this thesis, through the analysis of the multiplicity of demisexual experiences and of the interviewees' adherence to the demisexual label, I argue that the category of demisexuality can open up possibilities for living and thinking sexuality in diverse ways – rather than endorsing the logic of sexual essentialism built upon the meticulous self-examination and sexual classification of individuals. As will be discussed in chapter two, demisexual narratives can dispute the focus of sex/sexual attraction in current understandings of sexuality (see Przybylo 2019), as well as call into question the centrality of gender of object choice (see Sedgwick 1993). As Rob Cover (2018) claims, new sexual categories that emerged online have the potential to challenge binary and essentialist models of sexuality.

Hence, drawing on a non-essentialist understanding of sexual identities/subjectivities (that is, the idea that such traits are not innate/detached from culture) and on a qualitative interpretive approach to knowledge production, I conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews with nine Brazilian women who identify as demisexuals in order to investigate how they discursively construct their (demi)sexualities. This project is also based on the notion of discourse as event (Foucault 1981) that is, on the idea that discourse is not merely representative, but producer of realities and of categories such as gender and sexuality. The following questions guide the work: What role do gender and sexuality play in the lived experience of demisexuality? How do demisexual people construct meanings of gender and sexuality in their narratives about their demisexual identification?

Methodology and The Participants

To tackle the questions above, I conducted in-depth semi-structured individual interviews with nine Brazilian women who identify as demisexuals in order to investigate how they discursively construct their (demi)sexualities. The questions I proposed aimed at producing a deeper understanding of their experiences as demisexuals and drew on discussions that I have observed as a participant of online groups during the past six years (see Appendix B for the full list of questions). Three of the participants (Yuuki, Alice and Corina) were recruited from a Facebook post I created on a Brazilian Facebook group on demisexuality. As for the other participants, one was referred to me by Yuuki (Natalia), one is an acquaintance that I contacted directly (Sofia), one was referred to me by Sofia (Diana). One of the interviewees offered to share my call for participants on her Instagram account, from which the final three participants contacted me (Sara, Isabel and Isis). All of their names have been changed to preserve their anonymity (the ones that appear here were either chosen by the participants or by myself). The participants were sent a copy of the information sheet and of the terms of consent prior to their agreement in participating.

The interviews were conducted in Portuguese during in March 2021 and lasted between 22 and 75 minutes, with an average of 42 minutes per interview. They were administered via videoconference (Yuuki and Corina kept their cameras off), but recorded only in audio. I manually transcribed[5] the interviews in their entirety, but only translated the excerpts that are quoted in the thesis. Regarding the transcriptions, I follow Alessandro Duranti's (1997, 161) understanding of them as "abstraction[s] in which a complex phenomenon is reduced to some of its constitutive features and transformed for the purpose of further analysis." It is also possible to apply this argument to the process of translation of the excerpts of the interviews that form part of this work. Therefore, I understand the transcription and translation activities as central parts of the data analysis process, since my choices are informed by my objectives and previous readings, as well as by my position as a native speaker of Portuguese and non-native speaker of English.

Subsequently, I uploaded the transcription files onto a coding software and manually sorted excerpts of the interviews into 23 categories, namely: demi experiences (27 segments), being "normal" (15), identification as demi/"wow" moment (14), other people's reactions (14), label/naming (13), sexual attraction (13), non-monogamy (12), romance (9), attraction or something else (8), LGBTQ+ community (8), misconceptions (8), trauma (8), born this way

[5] In the transcriptions, I used "@" for laughter, "[...]" for redacted speech, italics for emphasis and "[]" for my insertions.

(6), trying to be different (6), conservatism (5), other (5), questioning heterosexuality (5), very important (5), bond (4), not as clear-cut (4), sexual orientation (4), definition (3) and autism[6] (2).

The participants form part of a relatively homogeneous group – most of them are around 26 years old and all except two come from Southeast Brazil (widely referred to as the "richest" part of the country). Six of them are from the state of São Paulo, one from the city of Rio de Janeiro (where I am also from) and two from the state of Goiás, in the Center-West. Due to the micro-analytical nature of the research and the fact that I intended to work with categories that emerged from their discourses, I chose not to ask the participants to fill a questionnaire stating their socioeconomic status or racial identification. Hence, general information is provided by themselves below:

Yuuki: I'm a biologist, I work with cats, actually I'm doing a master's degree now with felines, I've always liked cats my whole life, that's why I'm working with it today. Ohh I like to learn things, I like... different languages, so I study Japanese, I study Chinese... I really wanted to learn all the languages I could. I like anime, I like... games, books... yeah, that stuff. (24 years old)

Natalia: I studied Biology, I'm a biologist... I'm not, I'm still going to graduate... I'm 27 years old... oh, there's nothing else to say @

Alice: Today I work as an administrative assistant in a speech therapy clinic, but I have a degree in civil engineering. But so far @ I haven't found anything in my area. So I get by. Today I have a four-year-old daughter... I was once married, but I'm recently divorced. (26 years old)

Sofia: I'm 33 years old, I work as an English teacher and I also write on the Internet about relationships and love, which was the subject of my master's in Applied Linguistics... and that's basically what I do for a living.

Corina: So, last year I graduated in environmental management from university. And... I'm unemployed at the moment, I'm teaching English on my own because of the pandemic, right, that... we're in a COVID-19 pandemic and I'm- me and my parents are in risk groups. So I chose to work from home to save myself and my family. And I like drawing, painting... making crafts, I like it a lot. I like playing video games, reading books... (26 years old)

Sara: I'm Brazilian, right, since the research is international. I'm 36 years old... as it involves sexuality, right, I consider myself bisexual, I currently have a stable relationship with a woman... it's been a few years, I think about seven, eight years... well, I'm a teacher. I'm an administrator by training, but I work as a teacher in the area of administration.

Isabel: I'm 24 years old, I'm an artist, graphic designer and painter and let me see... I like animals a lot @ I like art a lot, I think I live by it, I breathe it... let me see... I think that's it. I think that defines me a lot as a person @

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[6] On demisexual/asexual online groups, it is possible to notice that many people claim to be autistic/identify with autistic traits (as mentioned by Sofia, one of the participants in this study). Due to time constraints, this is not addressed in this research. However, it remains an interesting topic for future investigations.

Diana: I'm 26 years old, I was born in 94, I'm a Virgo... @ I have a degree in Arts... now I'm doing a master's degree in digital and cultural studies... what else... I'm from Rio, but I came to São Paulo very early... so my accent is weird. It's... no one knows where it's from, it's always a mess... like "oh, where are you from?" I'm like "nowhere" @ What else... I've been in therapy for ten years... I think it helps @ And... I'm a writer, visual artist... uh... I'm trying to become a translator too... and a researcher, right?

Isis: I do a master's degree in education. Currently I don't work anymore, I worked in a school, I taught... I'm a... kind of a quiet person, also a bit extroverted, depending on the situation... I think I don't know what to say anymore @ (28 years old)

Moreover, based on the interviews, it is possible to affirm that most are in possession of an undergraduate degree (and some of a postgraduate one) and most could be considered white women in Brazil. Therefore, the mediums I sought for the recruitment of participants (Facebook, Instagram, word-of-mouth) led me to a demographic background similar to my own. Despite this, this work remains an addition to the broader literature on asexuality – which, as Mark Carrigan, Kristina Gupta and Todd Morrison (2013) suggest, lacks on investigations going beyond the analysis of online discourses produced in Western contexts.

The aim of the thesis is not to focus exclusively on demisexuality, but to analyze how these women construct their sexual lives in their own narratives. For this reason, although not an ethnography, this project maintains aspects of (feminist) ethnographic work, such as the focus on situated practices of groups of people with the purpose of "gain[ing] an understanding of their life world" (Buch and Staller 2014). Following a feminist approach to interviewing (Hesse-Biber 2014) − that is, one that considers my positionality as a researcher and the power issues that are at play in the process of research-making − I conduct a qualitative analysis of the interviews focused on the close reading of the interview excerpts (see Lukić and Sánchez Espinosa 2011). Finally, rather than approaching the interviewees as "informants" of experiential "truths" (see Scott 1991), I understand them as active participants in the research. This is reflected in the close reading of the interview excerpts, which draw on the interpretations some of the participants provide for their own experiences.

Another point worth mentioning is my position as someone who has been participating in online groups centered around demisexuality since 2015 and has been since then transiting between identifying and "disindentifying" with the demisexual label. As someone with a personal interest in the topic, I started navigating online forums and formed an understanding of demisexuality that was tied to the definitions presented in the introduction to this chapter. Thus, before starting the present work, I had projected a separation between what demisexuality "really" was and what were common misconceptions about it (such as the idea that being demi equals being sexually conservative). Throughout the analyses of the interviews, I sought to be

critical to this perspective and adopt a self-reflexive stance on how I approached and analyzed the interviewees narratives (see Hesse-Biber, 2011, on reflexivity in feminist research).

Another idea that informs this work is Foucault's understanding of discourse as an event. In opposition to the vision of discourse as a representation of an internal or external truth, the philosopher describes discourse as "little more than the gleaming of a truth in the process of being born to its own gaze" (1981, 66). In other words, discourse is understood as a creator of realities and producer of material effects. This notion allows for the approach of women's narratives as not simply accounts of demisexual livings, but as producers of demisexualities. Thus, the analysis of the interviews focuses on how the participants linguistically construct their speeches about the different topics that are covered in the conversations.

Finally, as Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln (2005, 10) argue, "qualitative researchers stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry." Consequently, the proposed work will not seek to construct generalizations or to trace relationships of cause and effect in the interviewees' narratives, but to analyze particular cases based on the localized posture characteristic of qualitative research (Denzin and Lincoln 2005). Hence, the thesis is built from the bottom up – that is, producing knowledge that takes women's narratives as the point of departure rather than trying to fit their speeches within previously established theories.

The Chapters

In chapter one, I discuss central theoretical ideas on sexuality that inform the work, such as Michel Foucault's (1978) critique of sexual essentialism and understanding of sexuality as discursively constructed, Judith Butler's (1990) notion of the heterosexual matrix as a structure that contributes to define who is "human"/normal based on their expressions of sex/gender/desire and Adrienne Rich's (1980) description of heterosexuality as compulsory. I also examine ideas that help think experiences that are not shaped by sex, such as Kristina Gupta's (2015) description of compulsory sexuality and Audre Lorde's disassociation between sex/sexuality and the erotics. Subsequently, I introduce asexuality/asexuality studies and present issues pertaining the subscription to asexual identities. Finally, I present a brief literature review of works that can be found on demisexuality. In chapter two, I analyze the participants' narratives on demisexuality in sub-divided themes, discussing issues such as demisexual self-identification and unstable/conflicting representations of demisexuality. I conclude with a reflection on the possible contributions of this work.

Chapter 1 – Theorizing Sexuality

1.1. Sexuality and Compulsory Heterosexuality

In the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault claims that sexuality should not be approached as the expression of an inner truth, but as a historical construct (Foucault 1978, 105). The philosopher argues against what he terms the "repressive hypothesis," that is, the idea that sexuality has been repressed by institutions such as the church and the family, most prominently from the eighteenth century onward. He contends that what has been commonly interpreted as repression – such as the Victorian approach to sexuality – is in fact part of a discursive deployment that provokes a proliferation of sexualities. Foucault posits that the medieval pastoral exercise of confession associated with clinical listening methods and the rules of scientific discourse gave rise to what he calls a *scientia sexualis*. The *scientia sexualis* is defined as a deployment that produces truthful discourses about sex, being inscribed in domains such as medicine, psychiatry, pedagogy and the family. Through their practices of examination, cataloguing and reporting of subjects' sexual conducts, these domains produce sexuality.

Thus, according to Foucault, sexuality as we understand it today has been shaped by procedures aimed at extracting, analyzing and classifying the subject's innermost "secrets" and presenting them as part of a hidden essence that needs to be "uncovered". Moreover, the subject is required to be an active part of this process of truth extraction by engaging in processes of self-examination. Hence, the truth of sex would be concealed not only from those who seek to extract it by employing scientific techniques of extorsion, but from the subject herself.

As mentioned above, these procedures would generate a "dispersion of sexualities, a strengthening of their disparate forms, a multiple implantation of 'perversions'" (Foucault 1978, 37) rather than the suppression of a preexisting sexual essence. Therefore, the unearthing, the analysis and the categorization of the "truth" of sex is part of a mechanism that both produces and pathologizes sexuality. As Foucault puts it, "sexuality was defined as being 'by nature': a domain susceptible to pathological processes, and hence one calling for therapeutic or normalizing interventions" (Foucault 1978, 68). Furthermore, subjects (particularly, "hysterical" women, masturbating children and others deemed sexually "abnormal") were interpreted as saturated with sexuality, which meant that

> the most discrete event in one's sexual behavior – whether an accident or a deviation, a deficit or an excess – was deemed capable of entailing the most varied consequences throughout one's existence; there was scarcely a malady or physical disturbance to

> which the nineteenth century did not impute at least some degree of sexual etiology. (Foucault 1978, 65)

This fusion between subject, sexual conduct and pathology produced a new class of individual: one that is intrinsically sexually "perverted." In this regard, Foucault argues that while the sodomite had been someone with a socially reproached sexual behavior, the homosexual was created as an ontological category: "Homosexuality appeared as one of the forms of sexuality when it was transposed from the practice of sodomy onto a kind of interior androgyny, a hermaphrodism of the soul. The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species" (Foucault 1978, 43).

Expanding on Foucault's ideas, Judith Butler (1990) proposes the concept of the heterosexual matrix. She defines the heterosexual matrix as a "grid of cultural intelligibility through which bodies, genders, and desires are naturalized" (Butler 1990, 7). According to Butler, it is socially expected that subjects present performances of sex, gender and desire that are perceived as coherent. In this paradigm, someone with "female" genitalia is required to present themselves as a "woman" and to have their desire directed at an individual with "male" genitalia and who presents themselves as a "man". In this process, a relationship of causality between sex, gender and desire is produced by diverse regulatory practices (a term Butler borrows from Foucault).

Additionally, not following the linear path between sex, gender and desire (to which she also adds sexual practice) places the subject under the threat of unintelligibility: "the very notion of 'the person' is called into question by the cultural emergence of those 'incoherent' or 'discontinuous' gendered beings who appear to be persons but who fail to conform to the gendered norms of cultural intelligibility by which persons are defined" (Butler 1990, 23). In other words, gender performances that are incongruent with this matrix of intelligibility – that is, a discursively produced and regulated system of sex/gender/desire/sexual practice – can put a subject's status as a person in question, thus framing their gender identities as "developmental failures or logical impossibilities" (Butler 1990, 24). Similarly, Foucault argues that "it is through sex ... that each individual has to pass in order to have access to his [sic] own intelligibility" (Foucault 1978, 155).

Butler (1990) also suggests that such "gendered norms of cultural intelligibility" are sustained by a system of compulsory heterosexuality. This concept is coined in a widely-cited essay by Adrienne Rich (1980), who suggests that heterosexuality is a political institution/an ideology that "has had to be imposed, managed, organized, propagandized, and maintained by force" while being construed as innate (Rich 1980, 648). Drawing on this idea, Butler (1990)

presents compulsory heterosexuality as a regulatory practice that, through the establishment of strict paths to be followed by one's desire, contributes to the production of a dualistic relationship between "male" and "female": "the institution of a compulsory and naturalized heterosexuality requires and regulates gender as a binary relation in which the masculine term is differentiated from a feminine term, and this differentiation is accomplished through the practices of heterosexual desire" (Butler 1990, 31). Thus, according to Butler, the sex/gender/desire system is an effect of compulsory heterosexuality.

This perspective could also be related to Eve Sedgwick's (1993) description of the series of presumptions that underlie the concept of sexual identity, such as one's "biological" sex, their gender identity, the "biological" sex of one's preferred partners, one's sexual practices/fantasies et cetera. According to the author, from a heterosexist point of view, if taking the biological sex of an individual and that of their partner as a point of departure, it would be possible to infer the complete set of one's sexual specificities (such as the ones listed above). In addition, heterosexism would imply

> that everyone "has a sexuality," for instance, and that it is implicated with each person's sense of overall identity in similar ways; that each person's most characteristic erotic expression will be oriented toward another person and not autoerotic; that if it is alloerotic, it will be oriented toward a single partner or kind of partner at a time; that its orientation will not change over time. (Sedgwick 1993, 8)

Thus, the common understanding of sexual identity is shaped not only by dualistic notions of sex/gender, but also by the inevitability of an attraction/desire that is oriented to others. According to Ela Przybylo (2019), by questioning sexual desire as the basis of sexual identity/orientation, asexual thinking helps imagine new ways of approaching sexuality. Moreover, as we will see in the next chapter, decentering sexual attraction when thinking about sexuality also displaces gender of object choice from the central position it has acquired in studies of sexuality.

1.2. Compulsory Sexuality and Desexualization as a Source of Power

The concept of compulsory heterosexuality is useful for understanding how heavy discursive investments over time can attach a status of naturalness to heterosexuality – and how they can also contribute to the naturalization of sex/gender, as Butler points out. However, while placing the *hetero* aspect under scrutiny, this notion seems to leave the *sexuality* aspect undisputed: "while being critical of the anthropological universalist conceit that there might be a truth of

sex, her [Butler's] denaturalization of heterosexual norms seems unwittingly to invoke the 'truth' of pervasive sexual desire, leaving the notion of innate human sexuality largely unchallenged" (Gressgård 2013, 186). According to Kristina Gupta (2015), asexual activists and scholars writing on asexuality have begun to fill this gap by employing concepts that expose the artificial "innateness" and normative aspect of sexuality, such as "sexusociety" (Przybylo 2011), "sexualnormativity" (Chasin 2011) and, most commonly, "compulsory sexuality" (Gupta 2015, Przybylo 2019). Gupta (2015) affirms that these different designations share similar meanings, but that the latter has gained more prominence in recent years. She defines compulsory sexuality as "an overarching system of social control" (133) that "simultaneously privileges sexuality while marginalizing nonsexuality, that regulates the behavior of sexual and non-sexual people, and that contributes to the production of both sexualities and nonsexualities" (Gupta 2015, 145). Therefore, this system entails the assumption that all people are sexual, thus driving individuals to perceive themselves and act in the world as such – be it through participating in conversations about dating/sex, displaying sexual interest and, ultimately, engaging in sexual acts.

As Gupta argues, the premises underlying the concept of compulsory sexuality cannot be primarily attributed to scholarship on asexuality. Hence, she draws a parallel between Foucault's ideas in the first volume of his *History of Sexuality* and what has been theorized by scholars writing on asexuality. As already mentioned, Foucault postulates that a discursive deployment of sexuality has produced an impregnation of sex in every aspect of the subject's existence. Moreover, the surreptitious nature of sex would call for the exertion of multifarious techniques of examination aimed at exposing hidden truths. Thus, both the notion of compulsory sexuality and Foucault's theorizations imply not only that there is a (complex, multileveled) system that produces an "innate" sexuality, but also that, should this inner trait not be visible, it would have to be "extracted" from the individual.

As Foucault (1978) also suggests, another implication of the fusion between subject and sexuality is that the perception of what is normal/human becomes associated with the "possession" and the expression of a sexual identity. Thus, expanding on Butler's notion of the matrix of intelligibility, it could be argued that, in order to be intelligible, subjects have to be not only *hetero*, but also (and in the first place) *sexual*: "the concept [of compulsory sexuality] seeks to emphasize that our society's definition of the human and the normal are tied to the sexual, but not necessarily to the *hetero*sexual" (Gupta 2015, 142). Therefore, people who do not subscribe to the sexual imperative are excluded from the category of normalcy.

The connection between having a sexuality and "being normal" is evidenced, for instance, through social discourses on disability and sexuality. Hegemonic narratives about disabled people frame them as inherently asexual, which has led scholars and activists to defend the claim that these individuals are as "sexual" as nondisabled people (Kim 2011). As Eunjung Kim argues (2011), the hyposexuality imposed on disabled people erases their sexual orientations and denies them sexual and reproductive rights under the guise of protecting them from sexual violence or attenuating caretakers' "inconveniences" (such as when unwanted surgical or pharmaceutical sterilizations are performed on disabled women). Moreover, the desexualization of disabled bodies "produces a form of objectification and dehumanization that denies the humanity of disabled people, for it is taken for granted that every normative body – and thus 'all' human beings – possesses sexual 'instincts'" (Kim 2011, 483). In addition to disabled people, other groups have been desexualized, such as older people, fat people and (U.S.) Asian men (Gupta 2015). Thus, in the case of people with disabilities, the dehumanization deriving from an imposed lack of sexual "normality" is added to the already pathologized disabled identity.

As a response to this forced desexualization, disabled people and other desexualized groups "may demand access to the category of human by asserting their sexuality" (Gupta 2015, 142). Moreover, as Gupta also suggests, society may grant this access when attempting to depict these groups under a more humanized and multi-faceted lens (such as when disabled characters are given a sexual/romantic storyline, which may help the projected able-bodied audience relate to them). Finally, the desexualization of certain groups impedes their claiming of an asexual identity: "when everyone is assumed to be asexual, there is no room for asexual existence except as a product of an oppressive society" (Kim 2011, 483). Therefore, compulsory sexuality does not entail a generalized sexualization of all individuals, but a regulation of "who gets to be sexual and when," thus producing both sexualities and nonsexualities.

While hyposexualized groups may seek access to the paradigm of normality by asserting their sexualities, historically hypersexualized groups may go in the opposite direction and stress their "nonsexualities" in an attempt to break with social narratives that stigmatize and dehumanize them (Gupta 2015). Such is the case of Black women in the United States. According to Patricia Hill Collins (2004), in the post-civil rights era of racial desegregration, a class-based racial distinction begins to be constructed in the popular imaginary. The historical exoticization of Black women begins to shift its focus from this group as a whole and to center on Black women from "lower" social classes. Thus, middle-class Black women were required to adhere to a politics of respectability, which would set them apart from others and supposedly

enable them to integrate with white people. The author shows how media representations of African American women from the 1970s onward constructed an "authentic" female blackness associated with "bitchiness" (being loud, aggressive and pushy), promiscuity and abundant fertility. Against this working-class imagery of Black "authenticity," middle-class representations forwarding the idea of Black "respectability" were constructed. These either deemphasized sexuality or virtually erased it: "these women are tough, independent, smart, and asexual" (Hill Collins 2004, 141).

It could be argued that the power derived from producing an image of respectable desexualization is illusory. In contrast, desexualization can be a source of power, as theorized by Audre Lorde. Lorde (1978) describes the erotic as a "source of power and information" that "rises from our [women's] deepest and nonrational knowledge." She connects this power with a sense of satisfaction and completion that we were taught to associate solely with sex, but which spans over all areas of our lives: "there is, for me, no difference between writing a good poem and moving into sunlight against the body of a woman I love" (58). The author thus disassociates the erotic from sex/sexuality and theorizes it as an inner potential for joy that is tied to the sensual and the spiritual, but also to the political. She also suggests that the commonsensical understanding of the erotic is tied to a European-North American masculinist tradition and that it has played a part in the subjugation of women: "On the one hand, the superficially erotic has been encouraged as a sign of female inferiority; on the other hand, women have been made to suffer and to feel both contemptible and suspect by virtue of its existence" (Lorde 1978, 53). Hence, as also described by Foucault (1978), who discusses the hysterization of women's bodies (that is, the conflation between the "female" body, sexuality and pathology), sex has been used as a form of patriarchal control. However, Lorde argues that the resistance to this paradigm should not rely on a suppression of the erotic, but on the reclaiming of the erotic as a consciousness of feeling and sensation that is not necessarily linked to sex.

1.3. Asexuality Studies

According to Przybylo and Gupta (2020), asexuality studies remain mostly on the margins of feminist and queer scholarship. In spite of this, it is possible to notice a steep surge in the literature on asexuality in the past two decades. There can be found works on asexual identification (Scherrer 2008; Carrigan 2011; Oliveira 2014; Dawson, Scott and McDonnell 2018), feminist/queer takes on asexuality (Fahs 2010; Cerankowski and Milks 2014), asexuality

and disability (Kim 2011), asexual erotics (Przybylo 2019), asexuality and intimate relationships (Maxwell 2017; Vares 2018), asexuality and systems of sexual normativity (Przybylo 2011; Chasin 2013; Gupta 2015) and numerous others.

The main non-academic source of information on asexuality is AVEN (Asexual Visibility and Education Network), a comprehensive online community created in 2011 that hosts forums, explanatory texts, FAQs aimed at asexuals, families and allies, news about asexuality in the media and other related resources. Because AVEN has been extensively used as a resource for research on asexuality, it presents a webpage with rules for researchers who want to recruit participants and/or quote from the forums. Additionally, a lot of its members actively engage in discussions about newly published research on asexuality and express an interest in publishing academic papers themselves (Carrigan, Gupta and Morrison 2013). Although the forums are in English, there are links directing the user to other websites where discussions on asexuality are held in several languages, including Brazilian Portuguese.

This community was created by a U.S. college student in 2001, three years prior to the publication of the academic paper which is broadly referred to as the first one to name asexuality (Bogaert 2004). According to Oliveira (2014), a great part of post-2000s research on asexuality departs from knowledge systematized and propagated by AVEN and, to a lesser extent, by other online communities. It is also possible to notice that most research on asexuality involving personal narratives is conducted either by analyzing data retrieved from AVEN or with participants recruited from this community, which has led Carrigan, Gupta and Morrison (2013) to criticize researchers' overreliance on online data collection methods. Moreover, both in Brazilian and in international Facebook groups on asexuality and demisexuality, the subscription to AVEN's categories and definitions can be perceived. Hence, this online community plays a central role in how asexuality and, by extension, demisexuality, is defined.

When exploring this website, the user finds in every page by the following definition of asexuality: "An asexual person is a person who does not experience sexual attraction" (AVEN 2021). As Kristin Scherrer (2008) contends, AVEN stresses the "essentialness" of asexual identity and emphasizes the difference between celibacy (perceived as a choice) and asexuality (seen as innate). While many asexuals express an endorsement of this definition, others criticize what they perceive as an imposition of one "true" definition of asexuality (Dawson, Scott and McDonnell 2018). Chasin (2013) claims that the asexual community does not rely solely on the "innate" definition of asexuality, but also considers self-identification as a crucial part of being asexual. The same author affirms that the academic tradition of defining asexuality as a

"lifelong lack of sexual attraction" (Chasin 2013, 405) has contributed to its essentialization. He also complicates the idea of "lack" that is widely present in definitions of asexuality:

> Bogaert (2006) briefly contemplated how some self-identified asexual people experience notable levels of undirected sexual desire in the absence of sexual attraction, while others may have the capacity to experience attraction but happen not to because of their utter lack of desire. This suggests that asexuality may not be as simple as a lack of sexual attraction (Chasin 2011, 716)

Similarly, the demisexual narratives in this work show that demisexuality cannot be understood from its definition (lack of sexual attraction until a connection is formed), since, as we will see, sexual attraction is not at the center of the interviewees' experiences.

1.4. Identity and Asexuality

Until the early 2000s, asexuality was categorized under the label of Hypoactive Sexual Desire Disorder (HSDD) in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM). Nevertheless, according to Danielle Maxwell (2017), research has shown that diagnosed sufferers of this disorder oftentimes experience sexual attraction but lack the will to act upon it, which differs from popular understandings of asexuality. Despite the fact that the 2013 DSM-V explicitly excludes self-identified asexuals from the HSDD classification (Maxwell 2017), the association between asexuality and pathology remains significant. Additionally, although the DSM is a product of the American Psychiatric Association, it has a central role in the formulation of healthcare policies around the world, including in the global South. As discussed by Borba (2015, 3) in relation to trans healthcare policies in Brazil, there exists a "discursive colonization" characterized by "the ease and rapidity certain authoritative Western discursive frameworks and their respective texts circulate globally and end up imposing ex-centric (Bhabha 1994) institutional standards of textuality by which the global South must comply, thus obliterating local culture-specific discourses, practices and subjectivities." Considering this and the narratives produced by Brazilian asexuals (Oliveira 2014; D'Andrea 2016; Santos 2016), it is possible to conclude that the pathologization of asexuality is also significant in the Brazilian context.

Scherrer (2008) claims that, in response to this pathologization, not only the academy but asexuals themselves sometimes take up an essentialist idea of sexuality as a way of making sense of their experiences and/or as a way of exercising political affirmation. In the first case, similarly to other marginalized identities, the asexual label allows for a reassessment of the

individual's "brokenness" and for the tentative occupation of a "normal" position in society. In the second case, the claiming of a seemingly innate asexual identity is used as a strategy to achieve recognition and political aims, such as the depathologization of asexuality. In both scenarios, an emphasis on the naturalness of (a)sexuality described by Gayle Rubin (1999) is central to the argument. Other than disregarding enduring long-established critiques of sexual essentialism, this position leaves the category of "normality" unchallenged.

On the one hand, a lot of research drawing on asexuals' narratives suggest that a "born this way" narrative is pervasive within them. On the other hand, Maxwell (2017) claims that there is little evidence to suggest that this is the case, arguing (based on Hinderliter 2009) that such foundational beliefs do not have as much resonance among asexuals as they are frequently assumed to have. She affirms that, although asexual narratives apparently rely on an essentialist notion of the self (including in her own interview data), such discourses are often misinterpreted by researchers: "Narratives of having 'always felt this way' become misconstrued as meaning 'and will always be this way'" (Maxwell 2017, 13).

To be sure, that the subscription to an innate notion of asexuality does not necessarily entail the endorsement of sexual essentialism. As Jeffrey Weeks (1995) posits, there are several paradoxes involved in the process of sexual identification. One of them is sexual identities' role in asserting difference through the stabilization of categories. As the author points out, the balance between these two movements is a thin one: the assertion of labels may work against the defense of fluidity that is central to understanding sexualities; on the other hand, the focus on the shifting nature of sexuality may hinder the advancement of political agendas that rely on fixed labels. Furthermore, Weeks claims that sexual identities are "fictions" that "provide sources of comfort and support, a sense of belonging, a focus for opposition, a strategy for survival and political and cultural challenge" (Weeks 1995, 98). This is the case particularly for what he calls oppositional sexual identities, which can provide a foundation for the self-understanding of non-normative sexualities and help envision possibilities for change. Hence, to affirm that sexual identities are "necessary fictions" does not imply that they are not "real," but that, as Foucault, Butler and others have theorized, they are constructed categories with material effects in the world. Thus, the reinforcement of sexual labels may function as a political strategy.

In gay and lesbian communities, the strategical use of labels has been widely employed. On this topic, Joshua Gamson (1995) describes the "queer dilemma," that is, the necessity to negotiate between the constraining character of definitional labels and their potential for helping the fostering of political agendas. According to Gamson, social movements face internal

struggles over agendas that emphasize “sameness” and others that foreground “difference” (Gamson 1995, 95). Gamson describes how, in the 1980s and early 1990s’, gay and lesbian politics’ focused on asserting sameness in relation to heteronormative society as a tactic for the acquisition of rights. By this logic, the claim for normality and ordinariness, even if erasing particularities, would help forward political agendas for populations that have historically been constructed as sexually deviant. However, besides the fact that “normality” is not easily extendable to all “sexually deviant” subjects (racial difference, for instance, plays a significant part in the selection of who can be considered “ordinary” or unmarked), this strategy does not question the rationale of normality that contributes to the production of oppression in the first place. According to Gamson, queer politics (and, subsequently, queer theory) derives from a critique of the commonality purported in gay and lesbian politics: “The ultimate challenge of queerness [is] the questioning of the unity, stability, viability, and political utility of sexual identities − even as they are used and assumed. The radical provocation from queer politics, one which many pushing queerness seem only remotely aware of, is not to resolve that difficulty, but to exaggerate and build on it” (Gamson 1995, 397).

At first glance, queer politics may seem to present itself as the solution for the essentialisms and erasures that oftentimes characterize identity-based politics, since it seeks to deconstruct discourses that sustain oppression rather than to claim a place within a normative paradigm. This may be effective when addressing aspects of oppression that derive from discursive/cultural constructions, such as the production of certain subjects as “abnormal.” Nevertheless, these constructions are rooted in institutional apparatuses whose violent actions go beyond discourse. Gamson puts this point forward, claiming that “at the heart of the dilemma is the simultaneity of cultural sources of oppression (which make loosening categories a smart strategy) and institutional sources of oppression (which make tightening categories a smart strategy)” (Gamson 1995, 403).

In the case of asexuality, the claim for tight categories can help produce identifications that move away from medical models that pathologize the lack of desire/attraction: “an essentialist notion of sexuality, then, may be strategically useful to individuals who wish to be recognized as legitimately asexual” (Scherrer 2008, 629). On the other hand, as Przybylo (2011) argues, because asexuality is also inscribed in the Western logic of sexual truth, its endorsement could ultimately lead to its reification.

1.5. A Brief Literature Review: What Knowledge Can Be Found On Demisexuality?

As mentioned in the introduction, the literature on demisexuality is virtually non-existent. However, there are a few works that deal with this topic. An article that explicitly (though not exclusively) addresses demisexuality and graysexuality is Hille, Simmons and Sanders' "'Sex' and the Ace Spectrum: Definitions of Sex Behavioral Histories and Future Interests for Individuals Who Identify as Asexual, Graysexual or Demisexual" (2020). This paper shows the results of a 2017 survey conducted with 1093 individuals on the asexual spectrum (758 asexuals, 179 graysexuals and 156 demisexuals), most of them white U.S. women. Through a questionnaire, participants were asked about which kinds of behaviors they would call "sex," which of those acts they had experienced and which of those they would be willing to perform. One noteworthy difference observed between the three groups is that demisexuals were significantly more likely than asexuals and graysexuals to define both cuddling and tongue kissing as sex. Additionally, asexuals stood out from the other groups as being significantly more likely to identify as aromantic (not interested in romantic relationships) and less likely to ever having engaged/wanting to engage in the listed behaviors. Therefore, according to the authors, "this study also demonstrates that identities on the ace spectrum can be studied together for comparison, but should not be collapsed into a single 'asexual' category, as has been the case in some other studies" (Hille, Simmons and Sanders 2020, 820).

Another work that can be found when searching for academic material on demisexuality is Alexis Barton's "Demisexuality as a Contested Sexuality" (2019), an article published in a student journal of the University of Indiana (USA). However, because its discussion of demisexuality draws mostly on non-academic work and the author's methods/methodology are not made explicit (it is only mentioned that a study was conducted and that people were interviewed in 2018), this article will not be examined here.

Finally, in a study of women-written Western literature dealing with the theme of virginity, Jodi Ann McAlister (2015) introduces the expression "compulsory demisexuality" to refer to "the idea that for women, sex is only socially acceptable and natural when romantic love is involved" (McAlister 2015, 9). Thus, the author explicitly draws on Rich's (1980) concept of "compulsory heterosexuality" to describe how women are generally compelled to associate sex with love/affection. In the coined expression, the word "demisexuality" is used in its commonsensical connotation, that is, one that connects this identity with a type of romantic attitude. As we will see in the next chapter, although the most accepted definition of demisexuality seeks to distance demisexuality from the idea of romance, some participants validate this association.

Chapter 2 – On Being Demisexual: Lived Experiences of Demisexuality

This chapter begins by introducing and discussing participants' diverse understandings of demisexuality and their implications for approaching this category. It moves on to complicate smooth narratives of demisexuality that dissociate this label from traumatic/repressive experiences and to question taken-for-granted elements of sexuality such as sexual attraction and gender of object choice. Finally, it analyzes issues pertaining the choice of self-identifying as a demisexual. Overall, it provides entry points into demisexual experiences and how their investigation can provide different angles from which to approach sexuality (ones that are not based on sex).

2.1. After All, What Is Demisexuality? Conflicting Perspectives

As mentioned in the previous chapter, demisexuality is a very recent concept for which there seems to exist an "official" definition – the one provided by AVEN. Although all the online groups I have been following depart from the idea of the demisexual as someone who is only able to experience sexual attraction towards people with whom they have a bond/connection, it is possible to notice that participants in these groups have diverse interpretations of demisexuality. A similar trend could be observed in the interviews. Below is an excerpt of Alice's interview in which she associates being demisexual with being "intense" and "conservative":

Alice: Um... people talk a lot about connection, don't they. And I believe that being demi means forming a stronger connection with people. The people we love, we really love. With our friends also- not just... not just in relationships. But with our friends. We love our friends, we really love them, we are very intense. And... let me see a definition... oh I believe it's indeed the intensity, we are very intense... and because we are very intense... intense and conservative? Perhaps? @

Joana: It's your definition, so...

Alice: @ So I believe we are very intense, we cannot... give ourselves to anyone. We can't... form bonds- pretend, you know, to form bonds. To get something. I think the definition is this, we are intense and at the same time conservative, so we... reserve ourselves for some people. The ones we find more interesting.

When asked for her definition of demisexuality, Alice does not make any reference to sexual attraction, which is at the core of the AVEN definition. Instead, she seems to frame demisexuality as a personality trait that leads people to strongly connect with others in a manner

that is more intense than the way in which non-demisexuals function. In addition, the behaviors Alice associates with people in this category (not "giv[ing] ourselves to anyone," not "pretend[ing] […] to form bonds […] to get something") imply an understanding of demisexuals as "conservative," truthful and moral. Thus, she projects a set of shared attitudes, values and behaviors on demisexuals that derive from a comprehension of demisexuality that is not explicit in current online definitions. Moreover, in this excerpt, the "reserv[ation] […] for some people" is not explicitly associated with people with whom demisexuals have a bond (as stated in the AVEN definition), but with people they find "more interesting." Hence, Alice's description of demisexuality does not meet standard common understandings of this identity.

Before I conducted the interviews, when I had decided that demisexuality would be the subject of my research, I had a strict idea of what demisexuality was, one shaped by the AVEN definition and its main criteria of "needing an emotional connection to feel sexual attraction." In addition, because demisexuality is often not recognized as a sexual identity, but as the consequence of a "normal" discomfort towards hookup culture (e.g., Murphy 2019) I initially felt the need to "validate" it in my work. One way of accomplishing this validation would be to stress the canonical definition of demisexuality as not a discomfort towards sex/sexuality, but as the impossibility of feeling sexual attraction except under very specific conditions. Having this in mind, I continue the interview with Alice as follows:

Joana: I see. The thing is that, well, there is a difference between... I think, wanting to do it, to make out or have sex with people you- with strangers or whatever, people you don't have a connection with, but not do it due to conservative principles or so, but there is the other side which is not even having that will in the first place. So...

Alice: So... I'm talking about myself. Um... I can't feel sexual attraction, just like I told you. I can't look at a magazine and say "oh, this guy is handsome." I cannot. I need to know the person. Just by photo, say "he's beautiful, alright, she's beautiful" but I won't be attracted just by looking. I will not be attracted to someone I don't know. Like oh I passed on the street and felt attraction for the person. I don't feel it. I don't feel any. I think sexual attraction... it arises in me. It arises- it takes *time*, it comes on horseback @, but it arrives one day. If the person is truly interesting.

In this second part of the interaction, Alice addresses an aspect of her sexuality that, even though had already appeared earlier in the interview, was not mentioned when she was asked for a definition of demisexuality. The dissociation between aesthetics and sexual attraction, the long time until attraction manifests itself and the need to "know the person" are elements frequently brought up in online groups. Additionally, in this excerpt, sexual attraction is framed as involuntary ("it arises in me"), which contrasts the previously mentioned voluntary choice of "reser[ving] ourselves for some people." On the other hand, the condition imposed for the attraction to manifest itself ("if the person is truly interesting") is unrelated to the often-

cited requirement of a bond/connection. Therefore, Alice's understanding of demisexuality seems to conjugate her personal experience with sexual attraction and her (conservative) values.

In the three excerpts below, similarly to Alice, Corina, Natalia and Isis do not place sexual attraction at the center of their experiences with demisexuality:

a) Corina: Then I noticed, well, if I'm just falling in love with best friends it means that I need an emotional connection to be able to fall in love and get involved with a person. […]

Joana: And do you think that- you need that connection... you talked about *falling in love*, but you didn't mention the issue of sexual attraction. Do you think these two things come together...

Corina: So. It's that @ this sexual part for me is a little- I have a little bit of blockage.

Joana: Um-hmm.

Corina: So... I'm still a virgin, I haven't had sex with... other people- with another person involved... so... I think- I just had I think one person I had like a sexual attraction for. It was a guy I met... two years ago. And I really only managed to feel this sexual attraction after... a certain event in which I had a very strong connection with him. So yes, I think these things are intertwined.

b) Natalia: I identify a lot with, you know, having to create... a bond with someone to feel something, you know? I think it's more in that sense.

[...]

Joana: But this- this *something* you mention, is it attraction, is it a fancy, what is it?

Natalia: Yes, yes, yeah. Yup. I don't know, to... have a relationship, you know, to be interested, I think it's more in that sense.

c) Joana: [...] you said that over time, after being very comfortable with the person... that you feel okay to have sex or to make out, anyway. But... like... can you pinpoint- I know it's hard, right, but like in which moment- at some point you think *oh, now I'm attracted*, or if it's more like *oh, now I have enough intimacy to feel comfortable*... I don't know.

Isis: I think it's more that last thought. I think I'm more comfortable moving forward than... but it depends a lot on the partner, I think, too. [...] But... I don't know, comparing... my current partner with others, I think it's a little different too. Like, normally with the others I felt more... comfortable to do it. And in the last experience I felt more attracted to do it.

In the first excerpt, Corina mentions "need[ing] an emotional connection to be able to fall in love," which is an experience that is arguably within what is considered "normal." Similarly, in the second excerpt, Natalia claims to need a bond to "have a relationship" and "to be interested," both characteristics which could also be found in allosexual people. Finally, in the third excerpt, I question Isis on her previous assertion about feeling more "comfortable" to have sex after a bond has been formed (rather than feeling sexually attracted), once again trying to

bring sexual attraction back to the conversation. Therefore, it is possible to notice that the participants do not emphasize sex/sexual attraction while discussing their experiences with demisexuality. In the three interactions, I intervene in their narratives with the agenda of tracing the line between allosexual and demisexual experiences, which they seem to otherwise leave blurred. Sofia, however, introduces a conception of demisexuality that is more tied to sexual attraction:

Sofia: [...] in the Brazilian group that I followed on Facebook, I thought there was a lot of this connection with being romantic. And... I think this is a conceptual error. To begin with. Because it's not about you liking or preferring to have sex with the person when you're in love. It's not about that. It's about your processing of attraction. It's about different types of attraction and how you feel. Because theoretically all people – only that this isn't the reality in fact – but theoretically people feel sexual attraction, physical attraction, romantic attraction... these are different types of attraction. And usually the path to sexual attraction, it can be through the physical and the emotional path. And what I understand about demisexuality is that the path comes only through the emotional and not the physical. For people who are considered normal this can happen in both ways, concomitantly or not. So when people come up with the very romantic thing, I... I think it's a conceptual error @. It's because the person didn't understand, it's... it can coexist, you know, the person be romantic and also be demisexual, but one thing does not imply the other. And another thing I saw a lot in these groups too - that's why I liked the international one more, I saw more diverse people in that sense - is that... there is that thing about... sex-positive, sex-neutral, sex-repulsed. And... in the international group there were a lot of people who were sex-positive. And I identified with that, because there were people who worked in the porn industry, you know @ for heaven's sake, you can be demisexual and work in the porn industry. I think people also confuse a lot the... the processing, which is the internal thing, which is how you feel the attraction, and your practice. You- everyone's perfectly capable of having sex with someone they're not sexually attracted to. Everyone's able to do that. Except that a person considered normal, an allosexual person doesn't think about these things. Because they don't have to. And the demisexual has more to do with that.

In contrast with Alice's definition of demisexuality, which is built upon her personal experience, Sofia presents a more detached depiction of this label in the excerpt above. Sofia constructs demisexuality as characterized by a "processing of attraction" that differs from the one manifested in allosexuals. In her perspective, sexual attraction in demisexuals would only come through the emotional "path," while in allosexuals both the physical and the emotional could lead to sexual attraction. In addition, the participant projects a division between what is "internal" (hence, objective and inevitable) and what is a preferred "practice," which she associates with "being romantic" (for instance, "liking or preferring to have sex with the person when you're in love"). Therefore, drawing on a model of multiple attractions (sexual, physical, romantic), she defines demisexuality as an objective reality that is independent from sexual behavior.

While Sofia identifies with a sex-positive attitude and seeks to dispel the apparent contradiction between demisexuality and traditional sexual behaviors ("for heaven's sake, you can be demisexual and work in the porn industry"), Diana presents a different perspective:

> Diana: Um... and it bothers me that this has to be an issue. In what sense. In the sense that like every time we talk about asexuality, demisexuality... *asexuals also have sex*... it bothers me, having to- like, still needing to put sex as a central issue in these livings. Which are livings that are not guided by sex. Like @. Guys, just don't- *fuck it* what allos think, if they think it's weird that you have sex, that you don't have sex. Or for what reasons you decide to have sex or not, right? [...] And so that's why it bothers me, this thing of like, everything being guided by sex. Like *fuck it*. Know what I mean? This was something I was talking to my therapist also, a while ago, we were talking about these things... and... I said like the thing is that I often don't even *remember* that.

It is possible to read Diana's point on "everything being guided by sex" against my own interventions in the interviews with Alice, Corina, Natalia and Isis. As discussed above, the fact that these participants did not touch upon sex/sexual attraction in their description of demisexual experiences prompted my interferences. Such interferences arguably rely on an approach to demisexuality that is closer to Sofia's, that is, one that is rooted on a more "objective-like" paradigm. This can be illustrated by the way the follow-up questions are constructed ("what is it," "can you pinpoint"), which call for specific answers rather than for a broader exploration of the topic. Nevertheless, despite my interference, their answers do not seem to emphasize experiences with sex/sexual attraction.

In the excerpt of the interview with Diana, she makes a reference to an often-heard discourse on asexuality: "*asexuals also have sex*." As theorized by asexuality studies scholars (see Przybylo 2011), a way of fitting into normality is to display a version of asexuality that presents less of a challenge to compulsory sexuality/sexualnormativity/sexusociety. This can be accomplished through the enactment by asexuals of a sex-positive attitude, which entails "endors[ing] sex as positive and healthy" (Carrigan 2011, 469). However, as Przybylo (2011, 454) claims, "in doing so they are demonstrating that they are not interested in dismantling sexusociety's project, but rather, that they hope to gain its acceptance, for they are after all 'still human'."

In the case of demisexuality, the claim to "normality" seems to be an easier one to make. Once a bond is established, demisexuals can function sexually in the same ways allosexuals operate (in terms of sexual frequency and types of sexual practices performed). Therefore, the key element of dissidence in demisexuality is the conditional aspect of sexual attraction (only appearing when there is a strong connection). Thus, at the course of the interviews, I have incited the participants to investigate and share their experiences with sex/sexual attraction.

Accordingly, their willingness to participate in interviews in which such self-examination would be required is also arguably inscribed in the logic of truth extraction described by Foucault (1978).

Despite this and against my initial expectations, some of the participants quoted in this section foregrounded aspects of their demisexual experience that are unrelated to sexual attraction (e.g., Alice's "intensity"), thus decentering the sexual aspect from their descriptions. As mentioned above, this decentering prompted me to gear the conversation towards the "bounded" space of sex/sexual attraction, where demisexuality could be validated in its difference. To better explain, because demisexuality is an unknown and mostly unrecognized label, defocusing attraction in its description seemed to me at first to leave demisexuality without a place for cultural recognition/political affirmation. However, this perspective ignores the fact that, despite having different perspectives on their demisexualities (thus destabilizing this category), all of the participants claim the label of demisexual (thus stabilizing this label). Therefore, taking into account queer politics' proposition against the resolution of contradiction and Gamson's (1995) arguments on the validity of both the tightening and the loosening of categories, the following sections present disputing narratives of demisexual experiences. Rather than questioning what demisexuality "is," they seek to explore how it is constructed in participants' narratives. As Weeks (1995, 166) affirms, "identity, or the subversion of identity which is its mirror-image, becomes a way of speaking about what could or should be, rather than expressing what is."

2.2. "If You Hadn't Had This Trauma Maybe You Wouldn't Be Demisexual": Being a "Non-Ideal" Demisexual

In addition to the above-mentioned reduction of the understanding of demisexuals as people who merely experience discomfort towards hookup culture, another common association that can be noticed in online discourses is one that traces back the origin of demisexuality to early experiences of sexual repression or sexual trauma. In this section, participants' narratives on this topic are analyzed and the idea of non-ideal expressions of demisexuality is discussed.

First, let us return to a part of Corina's narrative examined on page 25. The participant makes reference to a "blockage" with the "sexual part," which, in conjunction with her lack of experience in sex, arguably positions her as a "non-ideal" demisexual. In using this expression, I borrow from Chasin's (2013, 418) description of the "real" asexual as someone who "is not

overly disgusted with sex, is old enough to have tried to be sexual without success and does not have a hormonal imbalance or other physical condition that could be changed in order to become a sexual person." In other words, the "real" asexual is the one whose attitudes/experiences prove that they cannot be allosexual. As Chasin argues, this image is used to legitimize asexuality while simultaneously endorsing sexualnormativity. Allosexuality, thus, is perceived as natural while asexuality needs to prove itself "true" by producing exemplary individuals. In Corina's case, the fact that she is inexperienced in sex/relationships (in another part of the interview, she mentions having tongue kissed once), positions her as someone whose sexual identity might be challenged by the logic of compulsory sexuality. Similarly, Sara's experience with self-identifying as demisexual positions her as a "non-ideal" demisexual:

Joana: Well, some people also make an association – it's more with asexuality actually – with the person having some trauma. And I think there's a bit of this idea from people who don't know a lot about demisexuality. I don't know, have you already thought about...

Sara: Yes. First, even for me to understand myself as bisexual, first I understood myself as homosexual and associated – I and other people – to a trauma with my first boyfriend. It was very traumatic. And I associated it myself. Like, wow... but with a boyfriend like that, no wonder she became a lesbian, you know. Wow, from so much trauma with men or with the boyfriend she had, with the relationship she had, I've already made this association. It took me a while to understand that it wasn't. It took me meeting another man and being with him and it being nice and being okay... for me to see that it's not, so it's not that, it's not trauma with men. Because I really like women a lot, but I thought I only liked women, then I met this guy, then that made the... anyway. And then demisexuality also, at the beginning, there in the first boyfriend, when I didn't know the term asexual, but I thought I had a physiological problem, you know. And I thought it was because of that first boyfriend's trauma too. Like wow, it was really bad, so now it's hindered my sexuality for the rest of my life. In all senses. Of not wanting to be with the person, I felt bad about my body... I thought it was trauma. [...] And today I don't think so anymore. But when I talk to people, some still say, like, oh, indeed, it's easier for those who have passed... a difficult, complicated relationship, it's easier for you to feel at ease with people you have a bond with, but if you hadn't had this trauma maybe you wouldn't be demisexual, maybe you... you see?

Due to the fact that the pathologization of asexual identities has been widely argued against in the literature on asexuality, I frame the question above in a manner that implies a disagreement with the association between demisexuality and trauma ("there's a bit of this idea from people who don't know a lot about demisexuality"). Nevertheless, although Sara affirms not "think[ing] so anymore," she acknowledges the validity of this association by producing two narratives in which her past self places trauma as the source of her sexual identity. First, the connection between her previous self-identification as homosexual and a traumatic relationship with a man ("with a boyfriend like that, no wonder she became a lesbian") illustrates the imperative of heterosexuality as the natural manifestation of sexuality (Rich 1980). Under this paradigm, the natural course of heterosexuality is only disrupted due to a

trauma with men, − that is, due to an unnatural (and, arguably, pathological) manifestation – an idea that is challenged with Sara's later self-identification as bisexual. Similarly, the participant initially perceives the natural course of allosexuality to be hindered by the same trauma. However, unlike bisexuality, demisexuality does not seem to dispute the trauma narrative, which can be illustrated by people's persistence in it ("if you hadn't had this trauma maybe you wouldn't be demisexual"). Therefore, similarly to Corina's lack of sexual experiences, Sara's traumatic episode arguably positions her as a "non-ideal" demisexual, that is, one whose rocky path to self-identification seems to delegitimize her demisexuality by allosexual standards.

As touched upon in the first section of this chapter, a conservative upbringing is commonly positioned as the "cause" of demisexuality. In the interaction below, I depart from an understanding of this idea as a misconception. Alice, however, seems to acknowledge the validity of the association between demisexuality and sexual conservatism:

Joana: And there is this discourse, I mean from outsiders, saying that demisexuality would be... a more conservative sexuality. Something like that.

Alice: So, just like I told you. As I grew up in an evangelical home- today I am no longer. I believe it can be. Because... that was created in my head, right. When I was a child, since I was a child... to be conservative, to be more conserved. And it can be. I don't know how are the lives of other people, right, I never got to that point. But it can be. Sometimes we- the family can be more conservative, the person ends up being a little more, right.

As with the interaction with Sara, I frame this question in a manner that projects a split between "insiders," that is, those who are knowledgeable about demisexuality (a group in which I implicitly include myself and the participants) and "outsiders," which includes people who only understand this category superficially and, thus, present several misconceptions about it. Notwithstanding, similarly to what happens in Sara's interview, Alice endorses the connection implicitly criticized in my question. Thus, on the one hand, the validation of the association between demisexuality and conservatism challenges Sofia's understanding of this category as related to the "processing of attraction" rather than as a "practice." (see page 26). On the other hand, Alice's characterization of her sexual conservatism as "created in [her] head" frames her demisexual behavior as deeply ingrained within herself, that is, as not merely resultant from external social pressure. Either way, Alice's categorization as a conservative demisexual disputes the ideal narrative of demisexuality as unrelated to a sexually conservative upbringing/behavior.

Another participant who claims having a conservative background is Corina:

Corina: I... I confess that there was a time that I thought I was. Asexual. Because I didn't have any relationships, I lived a lot... um... solitude... I had my friends, but I preferred to be alone, read my books, which is a little more of an introverted activity... but I've been thinking for some time now that I'm not very asexual. That I'm more... I'm releasing myself sexually a little more now, I'm trying to unlock this aspect of my life... but it's little by little. [...] So it's just gradually, right. To... unlock this. Because like I was- my family is very conservative. And you didn't talk about…like, sexual pleasure, stuff like that. So I had to learn on my own, you know? And I even developed an addiction to pornography that was very... harmful to me, but I've been without it for a year and I'm doing really well. But that's it, a few very slow steps.

In the excerpt above, Corina suggests that her sexuality is stunted due to her conservative upbringing and claims to be making efforts to "unlock" it. Additionally, the description of her social life and her addiction to pornography produce an image that is opposed to Chasin's (2013, 418) description of the "real" asexual as "happy, socially outgoing, and not dealing with any mental health issues." Therefore, other than the lack of sexual experience discussed in the beginning of this section, Corina presents other characteristics that could be interpreted as outside of what is considered to be normal and desired. As proposed above, individuals who do not follow a smooth path in their self-identification with demisexuality can be positioned as "non-ideal" demisexuals. On the other hand, it is interesting to note that Corina associates her sexual "lock[ing]" to a previous self-identification as asexual, while her current self-identification as demisexual is implicitly connected to the narrative on "releasing [her]self sexually." Thus, although Corina creates a narrative of sexual repression, she does not attribute her demisexuality to her conservative upbringing. Finally, the participant's disclosure of an addiction to pornography challenges commonsensical depictions of people on the ace spectrum as sexually conservative.

In the excerpt below, Isis contests the trauma/repression narrative:

Joana: Well, there are a lot of outsiders who associate – mainly asexuality but also demisexuality – with having had a trauma or having, I don't know, being repressed or something like that. I wanted to know if you've heard this... if you think it makes any sense or not.

Isis: Yes, yes, there are many people in the asexual community who talk about it. Um... on blogs even, that I read a lot, and they put in the spectrum of asexuality people who started to feel that way after a trauma, right. Um... I even thought about it... because I also read about it... I don't think it was that, not that I didn't have it, not that I didn't have a trauma. I had traumas, but after that... expression I already had. […] I also thought- what I thought the most was actually this association with repre- being repressed. I think because of the fact that I'm a woman... um... the fact that I was raised in a... somewhat religious way... um... also the fact that my mother is more conservative...[...] So I thought this could also be a repression of my sexuality, right. Oh. Because I've also tried to do it in ways other than how I feel comfortable, how I see myself comfortable and I see, like, I still feel the same way, even though I'm aware of things today... um... it makes me think that this is not just re- it's not just that, you know. To be repressed. I think I have a conscience... I think political and feminist that allows me to criticize some things... in another way, you know. And I think also if it was just a matter of repression and trauma, I think most of my female friends would be like that. […] So maybe there are people who express themselves

> like that... from traumas and everything else... but I don't think that... that's my case considering the time when I started to have... anyway. Considering I'm 28 years old, right, and, I don't know, I started to express my sexuality, I don't know, at the age of 13, more or less. I think... looking at my background, I think it's much more than... repression.

Isis is the only participant in this study who traces a connection between being a woman and possibly being sexually repressed. It is interesting to note that, while discourses of utter asexuality might challenge traditional assumptions regarding gender and sexuality (Cerankowski and Milks 2010), demisexual discourses, when constructed by women, may seem to subscribe to patriarchal values. This is due to the association between this sexual identity and the set of sexual expectations that is traditionally imposed upon women. In other words, from this perspective, a woman who only wants to have sex with people with whom she has an emotional connection could be understood to be an allosexual person who has internalized sexist sexual expectations of female chastity (especially if this woman is heteroromantic).

In her discourse, Isis refutes such assumptions ("I don't think that's my case") while implicitly acknowledging the validity of demisexual expressions that derive from "traumas and everything else" ("maybe there are people who express themselves like that"). She brings forth several arguments that go against the trauma/repression narrative (her feminist consciousness, her persisting (demi)sexual expression throughout the years, her different sexual expression in relation to her female friends' sexualities), thus constructing her demisexuality as coming from "within" herself (rather than as resultant from external factors).

Moreover, it is interesting to note that Isis highlights her feminist status as a form of validation of her demisexuality. This could be justified by the connection between feminism and sex-positivism (Milks 2014). Appearing in reaction to the 1980s sex-negative antiporn feminism, pro-sex feminism criticizes women's sexual repression and defends a liberated sexuality as a means for achieving sexual freedom/agency, thus fostering relevant initiatives in the fields of sexual and reproductive rights (however, pro-sex discourse frequently disenfranchises asexual identities, constructing them as a form of immature or repressed sexuality). Therefore, it is possible to argue that claiming both a feminist and a demisexual identity contributes to the construction of a more socially acceptable narrative of demisexuality, since it deconstructs associations with conservatism/repression.

2.3. "But Aren't You Demisexual?": The Allosexual Gaze

This short section discusses two narratives of demisexuality: one that partially absorbs the allosexual gaze (expression here employed to denote an allosexual point of view) and one that breaks with this gaze by "othering" allosexuals:

Sofia: I have the strong impression that only those who are demisexual are the ones who *really* understand demisexuality. The other people- or maybe asexuals as well, right, people who are on the spectrum. But people who function in the way that is considered normal, they have a really hard time separating the type of attraction and understanding exactly what it is to be demisexual. And it seems that they... the impression I have is that they react condescendingly. Like... if they like you, they're like "wow, cool," like, "you found something that makes sense to you, but that's bullshit" @@. "In fact you're just picky, right." So you... you're not that complicated. You know... it seems that... I think even in therapy, you know? I think that happens. My therapist nowadays I think she understands. But it took her a long time to understand. The first time I talked to her about it, I felt like I was talking nonsense. Know what I mean? I keep judging *myself*, saying yeah, she doesn't believe what I'm saying, she thinks I'm making excuses for something that is solvable, or that I should work in therapy and I don't know what else. So... I felt that- I don't even know how much this was really happening or how much it was me projecting my paranoia, right. But... I had the feeling that she was looking for moments that would challenge this sexuality. Like, I don't know... if I had made out with a person I barely knew, this... "but aren't you demisexual?" @

In the excerpt above, Sofia's narrative about how others perceive her demisexuality illustrates the incomprehension that most participants in this research affirm having faced when disclosing their self-identification as demisexual to people in their lives. However, instead of perceiving an explicit denial of her identity, she notices what could be defined as an empathetic dismissal of her being demisexual. Although their dismissal is not made explicit, Sofia projects an audience that assesses her feelings/behaviors under the lens of sexual normativity (Chasin 2011). Thus, not only is she expected to be sexually "normal," but her own explanation of demisexuality seems to confirm this assumption, which arguably illustrates the ambiguous position occupied by demisexuality in the (a)sexual spectrum. Because demisexuals are neither fully allosexual nor fully asexual, they can be more easily placed under normative sexual standards by having their claims for recognition framed under being "picky" or "making excuses." In addition, in Sofia's case, her claims for sexual non-normativity are met with an apparent acceptance from her therapist. This acceptance, however, comes with the expectation of a smooth performance of demisexuality (which would imply, for instance, not making out with strangers). Thus, it could be said that Sofia identifies in her interlocutors a desire to bring her back to "normality," either by disregarding or challenging her self-identification as demisexual. Diana, however, presents a different perspective:

a) Diana: And the few times that... that I thought I wanted something were really with... with very close friends. So I... so at the time, as I didn't know what sexual attraction was, I thought that was it.

And then what happened was that in 2018 – that is, I don't know, five years later – I *actually* felt sexual attraction and it was really crazy. I was like ahhh, that's iiiit, nobody knew how to describe it properly. Allos are *bad* at descriptions, right, I came to that conclusion.

b) Diana: Like, it's always a bit of a shock. Like we kind of *forget*, don't we? I feel like I forget, like, that people... feel horny and attracted and etcetera like that *randomly*, you know? Like, when I felt it, I was like man do people have it, like, *always*? And they say it's... chill? Because it is *not* @. You know, it's something that like I think is kind of crazy @.

While in the previous excerpt Sofia presents demisexuality through the eyes of those who "function in the way that is considered normal," in the excerpt above Diana presents her demisexual experiences through the creation of a split between allosexuals and herself. In other words, instead of focusing on what others do not understand about her livings, in this part of the interview, Diana centers her discourse on her own lack of identification with allosexuals' experiences with sexual attraction. Hence, she produces a narrative that dislocates the strangeness that is usually placed upon people who experience little or no sexual attraction and attaches it to the ones who feel it "randomly" and "always." This displacement is also achieved with the use of the word "allosexual," since this term makes visible one aspect of the hidden subject of sexual normality. Moreover, by claiming to "forget" the pervasiveness of sexual attraction in allosexuals' lives and by classifying it as a constant "shock," she places non-allosexual experiences as the standard. Finally, Diana challenges the status of sexual attraction as a given reality ("it's […] crazy," "[it's not] chill"). It is also interesting to note that this positional shift (that is, placing non-allosexuals as the ones with the standard livings and allosexuals as those with "crazy" incomprehensible experiences) is constructed after Diana is exposed to what she perceives as an allosexual-like experience of sexual attraction.

2.4. "What Difference Does Gender Make Then?": Questioning Heterosexuality

In this section, some of the participants' experiences of disidentifying with the heterosexual label are discussed, beginning with Sofia:

Joana: Um, let me see... um... do you consider demisexuality your sexual- part of your sexual orientation or more as a category, a label...?

Sofia: As something aside? Um, I don't know. I never concluded anything about it because my experience... has always been with men. But I don't know exactly, um... but I don't feel comfortable saying I'm straight @. Um... I've been interested in women, but nothing ever happened. And... it was more of a romantic interest than a sexual one. So as I don't have a definition of... bisexuality, whatever, in my head, as I don't... I don't know if I can consider myself bi, I don't know if I would consider myself bi. Because there was a time that I thought yeah, there was a time that I thought no. [...] But it's something I've never put to the proof and I think these

things have to be put into practice. And then sometimes I think about this issue of demisexuality. I think, as my attraction comes through a... some kind of... affective connection, I'll say affective, right, um... what difference does gender make then? If I've been attracted to women like this but I've never had any relations, then is it because- I don't have a definition for that. It's a thing... it's a questioning.

In the excerpt above, although my question was meant to prompt a reflection on the status of demisexuality as a sexual orientation (or not), the response focused on another aspect of Sofia's orientation. The participant's doubt regarding her bisexuality implies the assumption that this identity should involve feeling both affective interest and sexual attraction towards two (or more) genders. Therefore, because she is only certain about having felt both of them towards men, the bisexual label does not seem to completely fit. Moreover, because demisexuality is often characterized by the inseparability between sexual attraction and affective/emotional/romantic connection ("as my attraction comes through [an] affective connection"), the fact that so far Sofia has only experienced "more of a romantic interest [in women] than a sexual one" seems to challenge this supposed linearity between connection and attraction. Finally, this excerpt brings to the fore one of the possible implications of dislocating sexual attraction from its taken-for-granted central position and placing it in the background when thinking about (demi)sexuality. As Sofia claims, if sexual attraction comes from an affective connection, "what difference does gender make then?" The following excerpt allows for a further exploration of this issue:

Diana: I have a friend who- this was one of the first, I discovered her blog... she talked about demisexuality... and I'd read this thing of like you can be demi hetero or demi homo or demi bi, right, like, there's this issue. And I remember I asked her, like, so what are you, then she was like, no, my attraction is for my boyfriend. Period. @ And at the time I was kind of... I didn't understand it so well, I was like, okay. And then I understood it, because it was kind of like that, I was attracted to one person. And that's it. And then there was a moment that I was like, people, I can't say... that I'm straight or bi or... or pan, I don't know. Because I was attracted to a man, so I know that... there is the other gender. But then I was kind of like, man, if that's it, I felt it once... what prevents me from feeling it for a woman or a non-binary person, like... so... this is an issue I also had, after I felt attraction. What I thought was kind of funny, like... I was attracted to a straight man, me, a cis woman, I was attracted to a straight cis man. Am I bi? @. Like this was kind of the logic @@.

As mentioned previously, Diana had a singular experience with sexual attraction that represented a turning point in how she perceived not only her own sexuality, but also other people's (allo)sexualities. When the participant concludes that her experience with the above-cited "straight cis man" is the only one in her life that she would classify as sexual attraction, she reassesses the "other part" of her sexual orientation, that is, the one related to the role of

gender in directing her feelings of affection/attraction. In other words, because she comes to understand her frequency of sexual attraction as very low, Diana seems to assume that there is not enough "data" allowing for her self-identification as "straight or bi or […] pan." Hence, similarly to Sofia, who questions herself on the "difference [that] gender make[s]" in her sexual identity, Diana reflects on "what prevents [her] from feeling [attraction] for a woman or a non-binary person." Moreover, the latter also points out the apparent contradiction implied in beginning to consider a non-normative sexual identification after a normative sexual experience: "me, a cis woman, I was attracted to a straight cis man. Am I bi?". Therefore, it is possible to argue that both questionings depart from demisexual experiences with sexual attraction, which indicates that non-allosexual ways of experiencing and understanding sexuality might produce sexual identities that are more fluid and less self-evident than they are normally purported to be.

Another participant that claims not being fully represented by the label of heterosexual is Corina:

Joana: And... do you consider demisexuality as part of your sexual orientation or more as a separate category, I don't know?

Corina: Ah, I think it's part of it, yes. However, like, I'm wondering, you know. I... I don't know if... being straight, um... contemplates me. You know? So I'm asking myself a lot about it... but now with a pandemic you can't go around and flirt, you have to wait for it to end... but let's wait, right, for what life has in store in the future. […] like, I already fell in love with a woman and such. And... but she is my friend, right, so I get kind of scared of spoiling the friendship, kind of. So I don't... I don't want to take this further, but like because I fell in love with her, I was like "look... so I'm not straight, right." So... I'm kind of like this, you know.

Similarly to Sofia and Diana, Corina seems to depart from an initial identification with heterosexuality that shifts into self-questioning (I don't know if being straight contemplates me"). Moreover, while Diana "discovers" her non-heterosexuality after experiencing sexual attraction for a man, Corina begins considering herself non-heterosexual after falling in love with a woman ("look… so I'm not straight"). Like Sofia, she expresses the need to put her sexuality "to the proof"/"into practice" (Sofia's words) – a possibility temporarily halted by external circumstances.

Finally, Yuuki describes how she concluded she was heterosexual:

Yuuki: I say I'm straight because... well, I never had much interest- I had no interest in anyone, but @ I knew that in women I didn't have. 'Cause really not even... not even in fantasy it attracted me, so... so I think that- but I don't know, sometimes there are people who may discover that suddenly can create a bond with another... of the same gender, I don't know... but... then it's this thing of philosophizing, right? @

The narratives in this sub-section show the participants' reflective processes of investigation of their sexualities. They ponder on the implications that their experiences might have for their sexual self-identifications, not taking their sexualities for granted even when they seem to conform to the norm. Yuuki's affirmation "*I say* I'm straight," (my emphasis) for instance, produces a detachment between the heterosexual label and herself as an individual. The other participants also produce unstable sexual self-identifications: "I don't feel comfortable saying I'm straight" (Sofia), "I can't say that I'm straight or bi or pan" (Diana), "I don't know if being straight contemplates me" (Corina). In addition, the identification with non-monosexual labels characterized most of the participants in this study, with Sara and Isabel (who were not quoted in this section) identifying respectively as bisexual and pansexual.

The participants' double-questioning of 1) normative forms of relating sexually to others and 2) heterosexual/monosexual identities might have implications in how we understand sexuality. As Przybylo (2019) claims, "sexual identities and orientations have been understood as resting on both the gender of who we are purportedly drawn to and the desire to be sexual." Demisexual experiences as presented in this work call into question both of these paradigms. In the participants' narratives, emotional/mental "connection" is foregrounded in their experiences of relating to other people, while sex/sexual attraction and gender of object choice is given less importance. Therefore, the participants' narratives dispute central tenets of sexuality – such as the centrality of gender of object choice (Sedgwick 1993) and the heterosexual matrix (Butler, 1990). When gender does not make a difference in how sexuality is lived, there is more space for new aspects of sexuality to emerge.

2.5. "One Thing Has *Everything* To Do With The Other": Demisexuality, Romance and Non-monogamy

In the excerpt below, I make reference to the overall content a set of posts that I have often encountered in the two main Brazilian Facebook groups on demisexuality (one of which where I posted a call for participants for this research):

Joana: And... I don't know if you've seen on [Facebook] groups some posts, like... um... that might associate being demi- or demisexuality with being more romantic, like, some posts like *oh nowadays people don't... they don't give flowers anymore* or things like that... *everyone just thinks about sex*... I was wondering if you've seen them and what do you think...

Alice: I've seen it. And I believe that's it, we... because we need to fall in love. We won't be pretending to like people like you see a lot of people doing, right. So much so that you... just take a look at

> Instagram that you'll see that people are posting that they're romantic, that they're... but there they are, liking people's photos... sending DMs to others... and I think demi people, they really fall in love, they won't tell people they're *in love* [if they're not]. We only give ourselves if we really fall in love. And then being really in love, we end up being too romantic, right? @ 'Cause we really fall in love.

The tone of voice I employ to make reference to associations between demisexuality and “romance” arguably points to a critique of such assertions. Despite this, Alice expresses her endorsement of such ideals by producing a differentiation between demisexuals − who “really fall in love,” as she repeats several times − and other people − who “preten[d] to like people.” Previously, we discussed Alice’s construction of demisexuals as more truthful and loving than allosexuals. Hence, what I would like to stress here is the relationship model that is implied in her description of non-demisexual people’s behavior online (“liking people’s photos,” “sending DMs”). These comments are strongly connected to a more traditional mode of relating to others affectively, one that associates affective/sexual exclusivity with “real” love.

Therefore, Alice projects an understanding of demisexuality that seems to be tied to monogamy − as a system that implies not only sexual exclusivity, but also certain behavioral expectations and a traditional conception of love. In monogamous discourse, love is framed as special and rare, which is a conception that may invite parallels with the idea of the “bond” in demisexuality (most participants in this research claim feeling the bond/connection that may lead to attraction on a very rare basis). Hence, further on in the interview, I bring forth the subject of demisexuality and monogamy:

Joana: Um... well, I think you kind of already answered, but... what do you think- 'cause there are people who are demi and are non-monogamous, or have casual relationships... do you think these are things that... I don't know, that can go together? From what you said not in your experience, but...

Alice: So... from what I see in the groups, there are some people who fall in love with two people @ There was even once a discussion where the girl said she fell in love with both of her friends. And she was talking, saying she was in doubt, that she was with both and I said my *god*, she can fall in love with two people. So for some people it's possible, because they can fall in love with two people. But in my case − I won't say never, you know, maybe I'll have some experience @ − but not until today, for me it would be just... it would just be him and me and that's it.

Based on posts she has read on online groups, Alice acknowledges that non-monogamy and demisexuality are not mutually excluding. However, the situation she describes is still inscribed in a monogamous framework, wherein someone has to *choose* only one person to occupy the position of partner (“she was in doubt”). Additionally, while the bond/connection in demisexuality is not necessarily described as love by other participants of this research, “fall[ing] in love” is once again at the center of Alice’s narrative. Thus, her conjunction of non-monogamy and demisexuality is arguably still tied to a conception of romantic love.

As suggested by Sofia in the beginning of the chapter, discourses that point to a traditional perspective on love and relationships abound in Brazilian groups about demisexuality. For this reason, I asked the participants for their views on the common association between being demisexual and being romantic:

a) Corina: So, in... in the group there, I've seen a lot of people like... demystifying that, right. That... you can have a connection, but you don't necessarily have to be romantic and be like- how do you say, baby talking. [...] But *I* am @ I am a very romantic person.

b) Isis: Ah, I think that, yes, I am romantic. There is no way to say no, right, because... because I'm a person who has this thing of wanting to fall in love... and having... someone steady to be able to develop other things... [...]

c) Sara: I don't know, I think in my case it does make sense, because it really suits me − it really is my way and both things are in me, you know. But I don't think it necessarily has to be like that with everyone, no. I think there is a way for a person to be demisexual and not have that more romantic profile. I don't think it has to be tied necessarily, no.

Although definitions for "being romantic" vary (Corina associates it with "baby talking," Isis with "having someone steady" and Sara, in another part of her interview, with "making surprises"), these participants identify with what they consider to be romantic ideals. However, unlike Alice, they do not perceive those to be necessarily tied to demisexuality.

Joana: And… I wanted to know if there's… um… I don't know, if you think people perceive non-monogamous relationships as opposed to demisexuality, well, how is the junction of these things that seem opposite, right.

Sofia: I think... it happens for those who also have a superficial understanding of non-monogamy and for those who have this *conceptual* difficulty with both of these things. I think it's once more of a conceptual error. And there are *a lot* of people in non-monogamy who are demisexual. *Many* people. It happens a lot. [...] And they are not opposite things. What seems to be the opposite is because demisexuality is very related to this idea of romance that you've already commented on and non-monogamy is very related to... having sex with everyone, and then it seems that they are two opposite things. When they are not. Non-monogamy is about you relating to more than one person- in fact it's not about relating to more than one person, it's about you not *restricting* your affective relationships to sexual and emotional exclusivity. Period. About not having a *rule* of exclusivity. Among other unconventional things. […] Um... in my case, I... when I had an open relationship... he was a very, very allosexual person @. Who went out with everyone, like, he had relationships with a lot of people at the same time. And I didn't. But I was in the mood to explore. I wanted to get to know myself better in that sense. And then I happened to meet a person I was interested in and who became interested in me and I started going out with him too. And I had these two relationships for... a year I think. [...] Um... and so, I thought it was really cool to realize how I could have... um... different relationships. With each. In both there was an emotional connection- I wasn't in love with the second, but... I really enjoyed spending time with him, talking to him [...] So there was a... an affective issue there, although I didn't find myself in love. [...] So I think one thing has *everything* to do with the other because it has to do with recognizing what each person's needs are, what each person has to offer in a relationship and that you don't need to find everything in one person.

In Sofia's narrative about her experience with non-monogamy, she places self-knowledge as both the main reason for such exploration ("I wanted to get to know myself better in that sense") and as one of the gains taken from the experience ("it was really cool to realize how I could have different relationships"), thus challenging the idea of non-monogamy as "having sex with everyone." Moreover, the fact that Sofia stresses that she was not in love with one of her partners disputes romantic ideas of demisexuality.

Joana: And do you think sometimes people have a hard time understanding demisexuality and non-monogamy as things that can go together or... I don't know?

Sara: I think people who don't understand non-monogamy that much do. I think they have this difficulty, but I think that those who already have an experience in non-monogamy, I think it's more... they understand it better [...] But the people I talk to, for example, the closest people, who understood the issue of demisexuality a lot, don't understand and don't agree with non-monogamy. They don't really like to talk about... and then sometimes they even say it, they say no, but... why do you want to be able to be with everyone if you just want to be with whoever you're involved with, I said no, but it has nothing to do with that. It's not that I want to be with everyone. I think that today I'm in a monogamous relationship. I'm just with my girlfriend. But I tell her we already live a non-monogamous relationship without it being sexual. I have great friends, women mostly, very close, with whom I share very intimate things, who I travel with, I go out, so you know, what would be couple stuff? [...] it just doesn't have the physical connection. Because I still have an exclusivity contract, you know. Then when I can explain this to people, that in non-monogamy there's even this of sharing... relevant moments, important things in your life with other people with which you have a strong emotional bond, right. I think it... breaks this a little bit... this *weirdness* of non-monogamy with demisexuality. Which I think fits a lot actually. It makes a lot of sense in my head both together.

Similarly to Sofia, who claims that demisexuality and non-monogamy "have *everything* to do" with each other, Sara states that the combination of the two makes "a lot of sense in [her] head." Sara also calls into question commonsensical perceptions of monogamy as being "with everyone" and of demisexuality of wanting to be exclusively with "whoever you're involved with." Therefore, both Sofia and Sara's narratives on non-monogamy and demisexuality foreground non-sexual relationality while placing sex/sexual attraction in the background.

2.6. "It's Not Just a Name": Self-identifying as Demisexual

Despite understandings of sexuality as a cultural construction, individuals who are outside of sexual norms have traditionally engaged in a search for identity:

> We are increasingly aware, theoretically, historically, even politically, that 'sexuality' is about flux and change, that what we so readily deem as 'sexual' is as much a product of language and culture as of 'nature'. Yet we constantly strive to fix it, stabilize it, say who we are by telling of our sex. (Weeks 1987, 68)

As discussed previously, the claiming of a fixed identity can not only contribute to individuals' sense of self, but also foster the legitimization of non-normative sexualities (Gamson 1995). In the case of asexuality, this can help imagine asexual experiences that are not guided by medical models, thus contributing to the depathologization of these experiences. Demisexuality, on the other hand, boasts a relatively unknown status and, as discussed earlier, is oftentimes interpreted as "not that different" from allosexuality. This arguably leads to more experiences of invizibilization than of stigmatization. In the excerpt below, Sofia touches upon this issue:

Sofia: Because I never liked labels. Never. Since I was little, as far as I can remember, you know. So... that's why I really liked the... the term queer, when I discovered the term queer, because... although it's a label, it's a way of... not getting attached to a label. So I never liked it. And then when I... discovered the issue of demisexuality, I didn't feel limited, I didn't feel oppressed by the label. I felt embraced by the label. Because precisely, if you grow up feeling weird for functioning a certain way, when you discover that it has a name, that there are other people who work like that, and you understand the processing of the thing, that... that thing of grouping, of community... you know. So I think the label can be important in the sense of community, especially if we're talking about an erased identity, an invisible identity. It's... it's part of you feeling welcomed and also of you understanding your own functioning. And then this even goes to the issue of the autism spectrum I was talking about, you know, why a diagnosis? Because it makes you understand yourself, because it makes you feel part of a community. It's... it's not just... a name. You know? It's not... it's just limiting if you... don't fit into that. When you fit in I think you really feel welcomed. So... this is an important issue.

In the beginning of this excerpt, it is possible to notice Sofia's aversion towards the "stabilization" brought by the fixation of a sexual identity (see Weeks' quote above). She describes her encounter with the word "queer" as representing a possibility of disentanglement from labels. Understanding "queer" as "the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone's gender, of anyone's sexuality aren't made (or can't be made) to signify monolithically" (Sedgwick 1993, 8), it could be said that Sofia challenges an approach to sexuality that relies on fixed labels. Nevertheless, when she discovers demisexuality, she does not feel "limited" or "oppressed" by this label, but "embraced" and "welcomed." It is also possible to say that, in her discourse, the demisexual label displaces the negative meaning that certain experiences ascribe to individuals such as Sofia (as she puts it, "feeling weird for functioning a certain way"). Following Foucault's (1981) theorizations on discourse, it is possible to say that the name does not simply attach understandable meanings to a pre-existing experience of demisexuality. By choosing to place their experiences under the label of demisexuality, Sofia

and the other participants in this study bring this identity into existence. Therefore, although demisexuality could be considered an "erased" and "invisible identity" (as Sofia states), this does not imply that this label preexists identification. Thus, rather than focusing on what being demisexual *means* a more prolific approach might be to look at what identifying as demisexual *does*, such as building a "community."

Diana: Um... and then I was asking myself a lot including... this issue of terms- how I found out what attraction was and such and... and it was really crazy, and I was like wooow, my god @ But I started to... to ask this question like of terms, what are the best terms... what to use and such. Um... I don't feel one hundred percent comfortable using the term demisexual these days because I know it's not exactly that... but at the same time I think... as a matter of community building it's the term that better... that I better identify myself with. The other term would be *confused* @ But I think in terms of community building that's the best term.

It is possible to affirm that Diana's narrative shows a high level of reflexivity regarding her sexual identification. Her quest for "the best terms" implies a vision of sexual identity as chosen rather than as a direct consequence of one's experience with sexuality. As Weeks (1987) argues, sexual desire and sexual identification are not always congruent. For instance, one may choose to subscribe to a sexual identity that does not "match" their feelings/experiences/practices due to political reasons (see Rubin 1999). In Diana's case, she favors community building over full identification with demisexuality ("I don't feel one hundred percent comfortable using the term demisexual these days"). Additionally, the use of the expression "these days" and the identification as "confused" point to a more fluid approach on her sexuality. Therefore, it is possible to argue that the excerpt above positions Diana's sexual identification less as a vessel for self-understanding and more as a political choice aimed at contributing to the creation of a strong community.

In the excerpt below, Diana elaborates on the issue of sexual identification, presenting the rationale for her attachment to the label of demisexual:

Diana: The time I felt attraction I didn't have…that kind of [emotional] relationship. It was much more mental. But at the same time I see that like... I think the translations we have for like... gray area... and like... gray ace and stuff and so are very... I don't think they work that well linguistically. You have to say like I'm from the *área cinza* [gray area] I'm... like... *assexual cinza* [gray-sexual], like what's even this, you know? It's hard to... to have a translation that I think works well. And I don't feel comfortable calling myself exactly asexual because I've found that I... can develop. Attraction. @ You know? Um... so I think this issue… remains. And then I think demisexuality, it's a term that... even though it's not, like, super ultra mega known because people think that asexuality doesn't exist and they're acephobic... I think it's still something they know the most about and it's the one that's closest to my issue. You see, I'm not going to say I'm *sapiosexual* because people will think I'm an asshole. I'm not. An idiot. I hope @ So I think it's much more... along this path, you see, I think... I identify a lot with... uh... experiences. Of the same type, right. Like I have a lot of demi friends and we exchange these experiences a lot, we have very similar things, so I think, like, again in this sense of community creation, the... the experiences we had

> are very close. You see? So I still think it's more... it's... [sigh] I think it's still a term that fits better if I have to use a term.

Based on her experience with sexual attraction, the participant disidentifies with the core element of the standard definition of demisexuality (the "required" emotional connection). Consequently, the more fluid label of gray-sexual would seem to fit her best. However, Diana notes that the translations for "gray area" and "gray-sexual" sound unnatural in Portuguese, which, in the participant's perspective, do not make them a good fit for her. Moreover, due to her "mental" experience with attraction (see page 42), the label of "sapiosexual[7]" is considered, but also discarded. Therefore, both possible identifications (gray-sexual and sapiosexual) are rejected not strictly due to their definition not fitting Diana's experiences, but because they either evoke meanings that the participant does not want to be associated with ("people will think I'm an asshole") or because they do not evoke any meanings in Portuguese ("like what's even this"). Hence, in this excerpt, Diana's self-identification as demisexual is built upon a process of elimination (not gray-sexual, not asexual, not sapiosexual) that takes into consideration both personal livings and social elements.

Therefore, in deciding to call herself demisexual, she foregrounds shared experiences with friends who also identify as demisexual instead of seeking a "perfect fit" with this label. Diana's view on her demisexuality can be illuminated by Przybylo's (2019, 3) description of her experience with asexuality: "I do not necessarily believe that I was born asexual but rather that I have asexual tendencies, that I came into asexuality in the way I came into queerness: because it provided me with meaningful self-narratives and held open theoretical, activist, and erotic possibilities." Similarly to Przybylo, Diana distances herself from a "born this way" narrative of sexuality, thus focusing on the (shared) self-narratives that are given meaning through her identification as demisexual. In addition, as the participant suggests, "community creation" is a movement that identifying as demisexual makes possible to a greater extent than "gray-sexual" or "sapiosexual" would. Hence, as Sofia suggests in the first excerpt of this chapter, sexual identification implies "not just [picking] a name" to make sense of given experiences. Rather, the name itself is part of the fabrication of such experiences and of the production of relationships with similarly identified people.

The interaction above continues as follows:

Joana: Um-hmm. So would you say it's a choice... that identifying with that is kind of strategic or I don't know...?

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[7] A sapiosexual can be defined as "one [who] finds intelligence sexually attractive or arousing, or finds intelligence to be the most attractive attribute in a person" (LGBTA Wiki, 2021).

Diana: Yeah... yeah. I would say so. Strategic-socio-political @ But these days I've been thinking about it a lot, like... of the use of terms and what I... what I prefer. At the moment I try not to identify myself. I'm like that, you know. But if I have to I still prefer that term.

Diana's more outwardly-oriented view on her sexuality is also expressed in the excerpt above, in which, after my intervention, she classifies her choice of identification as "strategic-socio-political." As Weeks (1995, 90) affirms, "self-identity, at the heart of which is sexual identity, is not something that is given as a result of the continuities of an individual's life or the fixity and force of his or her desires. It is something that has to be worked on, invented and reinvented" Diana's self-labeling illustrates this point, since the participant roots her demisexuality less in "the force of … her desires" and rather in the collective advantages of adopting that term.

In the excerpt below, Sara also expresses an identification with demisexuality that could be characterized as flexible:

Joana: […] I wanted to ask you if you think it's important that this label exists. Demisexual.

Sara: I guess. I think it helps people understand. Giving a name seems to legitimate it a bit. And I think sometimes even take up the label and then give up that label, if that's the case, you know. Because for me bisexuality then demisexuality were the same movement. Having this label helps empower you to a point where you can let go of this label later and understand that this can change... but having the label helped me a lot... to feel that it was okay, it is okay, that it was like that and not trying, for example, the next time I get single to push myself and be able to go to a club and pick someone up and that's okay. No, I don't want it anymore. I understand that it's not part of me.

The participant emphasizes the importance of the label in the reception of demisexuality by others, both regarding the understanding of demisexuals' experiences and the legitimization of the identity. Similarly to Sofia (but unlike Diana), she highlights the importance of this term for self-acceptance ("[it] helps empower you," "it is okay [to not be like other people]"). On the other hand, like Diana, Sara does not express an unreserved attachment to the label of demisexuality: "sometimes even take up the label and then give up that label." As discussed in chapter one, sexual identities can be understood as fictions that may be flexibly adopted and relinquished (Weeks 1995).

Corina: I think the label is good and the label is bad. Everything can be good and can be bad, right. I think if the label locks us in, it's bad for anything. But at the same time it gives us freedom. That's it. For me the label is important because- not because it defines me. But because from its existence I started to understand myself better, to respect myself. I pushed myself a lot to be like other people. It made me feel bad, because I felt bad about my way, bad about myself... and I practiced actions. That I didn't understand that they made me feel bad and made me worse than I already felt. Before, I kept pushing myself, you know. So it was a gigantic snowball. So for me the label

> was a release. It was a release. I'm not... I think as I said you can see that I'm not so attached to it, but I use it in a balanced way, I think. I think this way, which I'm taking at least for now, I think it's better for me […]. I think sometimes the label is necessary for things that are out of the norm.

Similarly to Sofia and Sara, Corina construes her identification with demisexuality as a way of "interrogating and challenging normalizing and imposed forms of identity" (Weeks 1995, 100) while not expressing a fusion between herself and this label ("I'm not so attached to it [the label], but I use it in a balanced way"). Like Sofia, Corina characterizes the existence of labels as potentially both constraining and liberating. She locates the freedom enabled by her self-labeling as demisexual as derived not from her insertion into a category ("for me the label is important because- not because it defines me"). Thus, instead of describing the label as a border, Corina construes it as a springboard for self-knowledge and acceptance ("from its existence I started to understand myself better, to respect myself"), which, in turn, leads to a change of behavior ("before, I kept pushing myself"). As Weeks (1995, 100) claims, "identities in this sense are less about expressing an essential truth about our sexual being … They provide continuous possibilities for invention and reinvention, open processes through which change can happen." Accordingly, Corina expresses an identification with demisexuality that is less concerned with the circumscription within a label and more related to the possibilities for living differently that identifying with this term might open up.

Final Remarks

The close reading of the interview excerpts indicate that the meanings around demisexuality are under constant negotiation, as are people's narratives about their demisexualities. As evidenced through the discussion of Foucault's (1978) and Weeks' (1995) ideas, the search for coherence in sexual narratives derives from the production of sexuality as a vital part of one's subjectivity that needs to be brought to light, analyzed and classified. Because demisexuality is a widely unknown label whose definition alone does not cover its complexity, this work also exerted the function of providing a situated "picture" of demisexuality through the analysis of the interviewees' narratives. However, the discussion of demisexual experiences in this work is not meant to define or catalogue demisexuality, but open up possibilities for thinking sexual identities that are not focused on sex/sexual attraction, as well as the implications their investigation might have for sexuality studies in general. As we have seen, throughout the work there are different aspects that are positioned by the participants as central in their demisexual experiences: love, intensity, truthfulness and conservatism (Alice), mental connection (Diana) and non-monogamy (Sofia and Sara), to cite a few. While these aspects take the forefront of these people's experiences, others occupy the background, such as gender of object choice – which has historically occupied a core position in how we approach sexuality (Rich 1980, Sedgwick 1993).

Thus, although the emergence of demisexuality as a label cannot be divorced from the logic of sexual proliferation and truth described by Foucault, looking into its lived experiences can foster the project of "using sexual identity labels, which have served us well and continue to do so, to move beyond them" (dasNair 2010, 2). This, however, is not an argument for the dismissal of labels such as demisexual, but a call for the production of understandings over how people relate to labels in different ways and the diverse life possibilities that are opened up when one adheres to or relinquishes a label. Therefore, the study of asexual/graysexual identities – especially the ones forgotten even in the academic literature on asexuality, such as demisexuality – has implications beyond the asexual community (Scherrer 2008), since it urges us to "rethink sexuality, queerness, desire, and intimacy" (Cerankowski and Milks 2014, 14). This thesis sought to contribute to the fostering of such discussions.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Declaration of Consent and Information Sheet

DECLARATION OF CONSENT for participation in:

Negotiating demisexual identities: Brazilian women's narratives on demisexuality

I confirm:

- that I have been satisfactorily informed about the study via the information letter;
- that I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the study and that any questions I may have asked have been satisfactorily answered;
- that I am voluntarily participating.

I agree that:

- the data collected will be obtained for scientific purposes and retained as stated in the information letter;
- audio recordings are made for scientific purposes.

See the box below for the sharing and reuse of this data.

I understand that:

- I have the right to withdraw my consent for the use of data, as stated in the information letter.

Name of participant: ____________________ Date of birth: ___ / ___ / ____ (dd/mm/yyyy)

Signature: __________________________ Date, place: ___ / ___ / ____, ____________

Declaration on data reuse **to be completed after the data collection has taken place**

(please tick the appropriate box and sign at the bottom):

(1) Sometimes, the data collected for a thesis is re-used in other academic publications (such as articles). Do you agree that the collected data can be used for these purposes?

[ ] Yes, I agree. [ ] No, I do not agree.

Signature: ____________________

To be completed by the researcher with ultimate responsibility:

I declare that I have explained to the above person what participation involves.

Name: __________________________

Date: ___ / ___ / _____ (dd/mm/yyyy)

Signature: __________________________

Information about participation in

Negotiating demisexual identities: Brazilian women's narratives on demisexuality

1. Introduction

You are being invited to participate in the master's thesis project "Negotiating demisexual identities: Brazilian women's narratives on demisexuality" (provisional title), conducted by the student Joana Castañon de Carvalho and supervised by Dr. Gianmaria Colpani at Utrecht University, the Netherlands.

2. What is the background and purpose of the study?

Drawing on an understanding of sexual identities/subjectivities as constructed, this study investigates the particular construction of demisexuality. Demisexuality is defined by Demisexuality.org as "a sexual orientation in which someone feels sexual attraction only to people with whom they have an emotional bond." Since very few articles dealing specifically with demisexuality can be found in the main academic repositories, it could be said that there is a lack of research on the discourses that construct the sexuality of people who identify with this category.

3. How will the study be carried out?

The study will involve in-depth semi-structured individual interviews with Brazilian women who identify (or have once identified) as demisexual in order to investigate how they discursively construct their (demi)sexualities. In other words, it seeks to understand demisexuality as it is presented in participants' speeches, rather than as a pre-set category. The interviews are expected to last maximum one hour. They will be conducted via video conference and recorded only in audio.

4. What is expected of you?

You are expected to participate in an interview with the researcher during which you will answer questions related to your identification (or not) as demisexual, your understanding of this term, your life experiences as a demisexual (including interactions with (past) romantic and/or sexual partners). However, you do not have to answer any questions you do not wish to.

5. What are the possible advantages and disadvantages of participating in this study?

You will not benefit directly from participation in this study. However, the study may provide useful data for the future. Potential disadvantages include: time investment and possible discomfort in discussing personal issues.

6. Voluntary participation

Participation is voluntary. You do not need to explain why you do not want to participate. If you are participating, you can always change your mind and stop at any time — including during the study. In addition, you can still withdraw your consent after you have taken part. If you choose to do so, your research data will not be included in the analyses. However, your research data can no longer be deleted if the data have already been analysed.

7. For what purpose will the data collected be used?

Your personal data will be managed by a single person, Joana Castañon de Carvalho. If you wish to correct or have this personal data deleted, you can do so by contacting her. The personal data will not be passed on to people other than the researchers who are directly involved in this project. Your name and other personal information will be anonymised (unless requested otherwise by you).

8. Is any reimbursement provided for your participation in the study?

No.

9. Complaints procedure

If you wish to submit a complaint about the procedure relating to this study, please contact Utrecht University's privacy officer, email: privacy@uu.nl

10. More information about this study?

Joana Castañon de Carvalho (researcher): [e-mail address]; [phone number]

Dr. Gianmaria Colpani (supervisor): [e-mail address]

11. Appendices:

1. Declaration of consent.

Appendix B: Interview Questions

Could you say a little bit about yourself?

Do you remember when you heard about demisexuality for the first time? When/how was it?

Do you identify as demisexual? How did you come to identify with this term?

How would you define demisexuality according to your experiences?

How does your demisexuality play a part in your relationships/dating/life in general?

Do you participate in online groups about demisexuality or asexuality? What do you see in these groups?

Do you think there are misconceptions about demisexuality?

Have you ever read/heard associations between being demisexual and being repressed, conservative or romantic?

Do you experience sexual attraction? How would you describe it?

How do you understand the “bond” needed for sexual attraction to happen?

In your experience, does this bond happen frequently or is it rare? Does it take some time to happen or is it faster?

Have you told anyone about your demisexuality? How did they react?

Do you know/talk to other demisexual people?

Do you consider demisexuality to be a sexual orientation?

Do you consider demisexuality to be a central part of your sexuality or as something aside?

Do you think demisexuality is/should be part of the LGBTQ+ community?

Would you say you suffer sexual oppression?

Do you have any experience/interest in non-monogamous practices?

Do you think you were born this way? Or do you understand it as a construction/process?

Do you think it is important that this label exists?

Do you think the term demisexual fully contemplates your experiences?

Have you ever thought you might be asexual?

Do you have a religion?

Why did you decide to take part in this research?

Is there anything else you would like to say/anything that you had expected to be asked?

Is there a name by which you would like to be referred to in the written work?