

**“Where do I fit?”**  
**An Exploration of Bisexuality as a Liminal Space**

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## **Abstract**

Given that bisexuality rejects the monosexist heterosexual/homosexual binary and decentralises gender in sexual object choice, bisexuality is poised to deconstruct gender and sexuality binaries. Unfortunately, the majority of attempts by bisexuality and queer theorists to use bisexuality as an epistemological perspective have failed to acknowledge bisexuality as an identity/subject position. This study aims to provide an approach to bisexuality that simultaneously acknowledges the lived reality of bisexual-identifying individuals while recognising the potential of bisexuality as a hypothetical tool of analysis in queer theorising. Building on the argument that bisexuality is only truly useful to queer theory if both aspects of the orientation are acknowledged, this thesis asks: how does understanding bisexuality as a “liminal space”, encompassing both bisexuality as an identity/subject position and bisexuality as an epistemological perspective, enhance the contribution of bisexuality to queer theory? Typically used in anthropology, “liminal space” describes the gap that exists “betwixt and between” socially constructed categories.

Based on the fact that bisexual identity/subjectivity has largely been overlooked within sexuality scholarship in favour of reducing bisexuality to a hypothetical, this thesis worked predominantly with semi-structured interviews in effort to maximise the voices of bisexual-identifying individuals. Using a combination of thematic analysis and discourse analysis, the research demonstrated how bisexuality and bisexual-identifying individuals are consistently positioned between and outside of the heterosexual/homosexual binary, skirting the border of both without fully belonging to either. For this reason, this research proposes that bisexuality be understood as a liminal space. Further research is needed to fully explore the potential of this conceptualisation, and to explore the influence of intersecting identity categories in shaping bisexual subjectivity. Largely still ignored in both sexuality scholarship and in LGBTQ+ communities and activism, sexuality scholars, particularly queer theorists, would greatly benefit from sustained engagement with bisexuality – and vice versa, as to do so would finally grant bisexuality and the bisexual community the attention it deserves.

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## Introduction

Bisexuality describes an individual “who experiences emotional, romantic and/or sexual attraction to, or engages in romantic or sexual relationships with, more than one sex or gender.”<sup>1</sup> Rejecting Western monosexism – a binary social construction of sexuality that assumes individuals are exclusively attracted to the same or “opposite” gender (heterosexuality/homosexuality), reliant on the gender binary (male/female) – bisexuality provides the “ideal starting place” for queer theory, which emerged in the 1990s with the goal of bringing greater fluidity to sexuality and gender by deconstructing identity categories and their respective binaries.<sup>23</sup> Yet there is a “curious gap” in queer theory concerning bisexuality.<sup>4</sup> Such marginalisation and erasure is evident throughout sexuality scholarship, mirrored by bisexuality’s apparent absence in sexual minority activism and LGBTQ+ spaces. Various explanations have been provided by activists and scholars alike to justify this eradication of bisexuality, leading legal scholar Kenji Yoshino to conclude that both heterosexuals and homosexuals have a shared investment in keeping bisexuality invisible, sustaining what Yoshino termed “the epistemic contract of bisexual erasure.”<sup>56</sup> The establishment of bisexual theory in the 1990s sought to challenge anti-bisexual discourse, focusing particularly on queer theory’s failure to properly address bisexuality.<sup>7</sup> Mostly taking the position that the inclusion of bisexuality would reveal queer theory’s continued reliance on the heterosexual/homosexual binary, bisexuality scholars argued that adding bisexuality to the canon of queer theory would help the discipline achieve its goals of deconstruction.<sup>8</sup> Consequently, these theorists proposed the utilisation of bisexuality as an analytical lens through which to view the world.

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<sup>1</sup> Understanding Bisexuality,” *American Psychological Association*, accessed July 29, 2020, <https://www-apa-org.proxy.library.uu.nl/pi/lgbt/resources/bisexual>.

<sup>2</sup> Cheryl Kwok, Sharon Rostosky and Ellen D.B. Riggle, “Bisexual-Identifying Women’s Relationship Expectations of Female- and Male-Identifying Partners,” *Journal of Bisexuality*, ‘Latest articles’ (2020): 3.

<sup>3</sup> Suzanne Pennington, “Bisexuals “Doing Gender” in Romantic Relationships,” *Journal of Bisexuality* 9, no. 1 (2009), 39.

<sup>4</sup> April Scarlett Callis, “Playing with Butler and Foucault: Bisexuality and Queer Theory,” *Journal of Bisexuality* 9, no. 3 (2009): 216.

<sup>5</sup> Kenji Yoshino, “The Epistemic Contract of Bisexual Erasure,” *Stanford Law Review* 52, no. 2 (2000), 361.

<sup>6</sup> Mark Gammon and Kirsten Isgro, “Troubling the Canon,” *Journal of Bisexuality* 52 nos. 1-2 (2006): 170; Pennington, “Bisexuals “Doing Gender” in Romantic Relationships,” 65.

<sup>7</sup> Lachlan MacDowall, “Historicising Contemporary Bisexuality,” *Journal of Bisexuality* 9, no. 1 (2009): 3.

<sup>8</sup> Katryn G. Burrill, “Queering Bisexuality,” *Journal of Bisexuality* 2, nos. 2-3 (2001): 95; Laura Erickson-Schroth and Jennifer Mitchell, “Queering Queer Theory, or Why Bisexuality Matters,” *Journal of Bisexuality* 9, nos. 3-4 (2009): 312.

Feminist theorist Elisabeth Däumer first suggested the use of bisexuality “not as an identity that integrates heterosexual and homosexual orientations, but as an epistemological as well as ethical vantage point from which we can examine and deconstruct the bipolar framework of gender and sexuality” in her 1992 essay, ““Queer Ethics: Or, The Challenge of Bisexuality to Lesbian Ethics.”<sup>9</sup> Subsequent bisexuality and queer theorists have adopted bisexual epistemologies in their attempts to deconstruct gendered and sexuality binaries. However, as a result, the lived reality of “bisexuality as an identity and subject position” has been consistently overlooked – resulting in the erasure of bisexual voices once more.<sup>10</sup> “Bisexual subjectivity” describes “the sexual self-concept that includes a person’s perception of their thoughts, feelings, and behaviours related to their sexuality and sexual behaviours.”<sup>11</sup> Scholars Georgina Voss, Kath Browne and Camel Gupta note that “the possibility of simultaneously inhabiting these positions... has been undertheorised” to the detriment of bisexuality’s contribution to queer theory.<sup>12</sup> They argue that in order for bisexuality to be truly beneficial to queer theorising, “the particular knot of bi as stable identity; bi as umbrella for a set of practices; and bi as deconstructive tool” needs to be explored.<sup>13</sup> I propose that conceptualising bisexuality as a liminal space offers a way of encompassing both bisexuality as a lived reality and bisexual epistemology. Typically used in anthropology, liminality describes being “betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial.”<sup>14</sup>

### *Aim of Research and Methods*

The aim of this thesis is bipartite. First, I explore how and why bisexuality has been marginalised and ignored in sexuality scholarship, focusing particularly on the absence of bisexuality in queer theory. Secondly, I explore how the utilisation of bisexuality as an epistemology has erased bisexual reality, before proposing that understanding bisexuality as a liminal space overcomes this issue.

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<sup>9</sup> Elisabeth Däumer, “Queer Ethics: Or, the Challenge of Bisexuality to Lesbian Ethics,” *Hypatia* 7, no. 4 (1992): 98.

<sup>10</sup> Georgina Voss, Kath Browne & Camel Gupta, “Embracing the “And”: Between Queer and Bisexual Theory at Brighton BiFest,” *Journal of Homosexuality* 61, no. 11 (2014): 1606.

<sup>11</sup> Zenaida Anastasia Rivera, "Sexual Subjectivity In Lesbian, Gay, And Bisexual Emerging Adults," [Abstract], *Wayne State University Theses* (2018): 687.

[https://digitalcommons.wayne.edu/oa\\_theses/687](https://digitalcommons.wayne.edu/oa_theses/687)

<sup>12</sup> Voss et al., “Embracing the “And”,” 1606.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 1620.

<sup>14</sup> Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (London: Routledge and Kegan, 1969): 359.

My main research question is:

*How does understanding bisexuality as a “liminal space”, encompassing both bisexuality as an identity/subject position and bisexuality as an epistemological perspective, enhance the contribution of bisexuality to queer theory?*

I explore three sub-questions:

- *How is bisexuality (and other plurisexual identities) marginalised in sexual minority activism/communities and sexuality scholarship e.g. bisexuality stereotypes?*
- *How has sexual minority activism influenced sexuality scholarship?*
- *How has the utilisation of bisexuality as a lens of deconstruction erased the lived reality of bisexual-identifying individuals?*

To answer my research questions, I use interviews made available to me while completing my Masters internship with OurStory Scotland, a small Scottish charity that records the life stories of Scotland’s LGBTQ+ community. I analyse my data using a combination of thematic analysis and discourse analysis. By answering my research questions through an analysis of interviews concerning the lived experiences of bisexual-identifying individuals (and interviewees who did not identify as bisexual but have had same- and other-gender attraction), I aim to offer an approach to bisexuality that combines bisexuality as a lived reality and bisexuality as an epistemological vantage point. To do so would greatly contribute to bisexuality scholarship and queer theory, as the potential of such an endeavour has been largely overlooked until now, to the disadvantage of both disciplines.

### Structure

The thesis is divided into four chapters. In Chapter 1, I conduct a literature review that maps the erasure of bisexuality in sexuality scholarship, spanning from the 1970s to contemporary studies. I address how and why bisexuality has been excluded from sexual minority activism, and how this influenced bisexuality’s absence in sexuality scholarship. I then focus on the exclusion of bisexuality from queer theory, and how bisexuality theorists have attempted to add bisexuality to its canon. By doing so, I demonstrate how bisexual epistemologies erase

bisexual existence. I conclude the chapter with an exploration of liminality, and how this relates to bisexuality. In Chapter 2, I discuss the methods I used to conduct my research and provide my rationale for doing so. I address the limitations of my methods and contextualise my research within a Scottish setting. I also explain my positionality. In Chapter 3, I examine the findings of my research, identifying 3 key themes in the interviews – Biphobia/Bi-Negativity, Need for Recognition, and Feeling Between Two Worlds. I relate this to existing bisexuality scholarship. In the concluding chapter, I propose the application of liminality to bisexuality, relating it to my analysis in the previous chapter, and illustrating how this approach enables the use of bisexuality as a tool of deconstruction without ignoring bisexual existence.



## **Chapter 1: Contextualisation and Conceptual Tools**

Bisexuality has been marginalised in sexuality studies since the 1970s; only in the last thirty years or so has the discipline broadened to a more inclusive LGBTQ+ approach.<sup>1516</sup> Despite the 1990s witnessing the establishment of bisexuality scholarship, encompassing interdisciplinary studies of sociology, psychology, English, and history, bisexuality remains largely ignored in sexuality scholarship.<sup>1718</sup> The first section of this chapter explores why this under-representation exists, addressing the ambiguous definition of “bisexuality” and the historical trajectory of sexuality studies from the 1970s until the present to demonstrate how bisexuality has been marginalised. I consider the initial focus of sexuality studies in the 1970s and how bisexuality was conceived before this; the institutionalisation of lesbian and gay studies and the predominance of radical/lesbian feminist analysis in the 1980s; the emergence of queer theory in the 1990s, and; the broadening of sexuality scholarship in the 2000s to include LGBTQ+ issues.<sup>19</sup> I also highlight how the key themes within bisexuality scholarship – bi-negativity/biphobia; bi-erasure; and bi-invisibility – are present throughout sexuality scholarship. In doing so, I exhibit how bisexuality has consistently been erased. The second section of this chapter outlines my theoretical framework through a discussion of the conceptual tools I will use to conduct my analysis. I consider the absence of bisexuality in queer theory and the methods adopted by bisexuality scholars to add bisexuality to its canon, namely bisexuality as an epistemological perspective. I conclude with an overview of the concept of liminality and my justification for applying it to bisexuality.

### **1.1. Contextualisation**

#### *Ambiguous Definitions*

There is general agreement within bisexuality scholarship on the absence of a single definition of “bisexuality.” Sociologist Christian Klesse notes bisexuality has described “a range of

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<sup>15</sup> Surya Monro, Sally Hines, and Antony Osborne, “Is Bisexuality Invisible? A Review of Sexualities Scholarship 19970-2015,” *The Sociological Review* 4 (2017): 667.

<sup>16</sup> The abbreviation of “Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer+”.

<sup>17</sup> MacDowall, “Historicising Contemporary Bisexuality,” 3.

<sup>18</sup> April Scarlette Callis, “The Black Sheep of the Pink Flock: Labels, Stigma, and Bisexual Identity,” *Journal of Bisexuality* 13, no. 1 (2013): 85.

<sup>19</sup> I am using “radical/lesbian feminism” to acknowledge the overlap between radical feminism and lesbian feminism, particularly the promotion of “political lesbianism” as an alternative to heterosexual sex with men in patriarchal culture.

different phenomena” since its emergence in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, appearing in biological, medical, psychiatric and sexological writing.<sup>20</sup> For this thesis, I adopt the approach of bisexuality scholars April Callis and Surya Monro et al., using “bisexual” as an adjective to represent sex acts and attractions to same- and other-sex persons, and as a noun to describe people who have these attractions.<sup>21</sup> Bisexuality thus describes (possibly unacted on) desires and behaviours, and an identity. It should be acknowledged that my chosen definition is not universal; interpretations of what “counts” as bisexual differ significantly.<sup>22</sup> It should also be noted that other plurisexual (sexual attraction to more than one gender) labels exist, such as pansexual.<sup>23</sup> Some LGBTQ+ individuals reject “bisexuality” because they feel that “bi-sexual” implies there are only two sexes or genders, supporting the gender binary – despite bisexuals’ insistence that bisexuality does not rely on dichotomous conceptualisations of gender.<sup>24,25</sup>

Scholarship concerning the ambiguity of “bisexuality” is divided on whether or not it is a good thing. Some bisexuality scholars, such as Robyn Ochs, argue the lack of a single definition is a source of political strength, as ambiguity ensures inclusivity of heterogenous identities.<sup>26</sup> Other scholars, including Klesse, maintain the lack of definition is damaging as people are less likely to identify with an undefined label – which the adoption of other labels such as pansexual evidences.<sup>27</sup> To account for contemporary understandings of bisexuality, numerous scholars have attempted to historicise the term, such as Steven Angelides (2001), Ulrich Gooß (2008), and Lachlan MacDowall (2009).<sup>28,29,30</sup> All argue that modern understandings of bisexuality have resulted primarily from the establishment of the science of sexuality during the 1800s.

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<sup>20</sup> Christian Klesse, “Shady Characters, Untrustworthy Partners, and Promiscuous Sluts: Creating Bisexual Intimacies in the Face of Heteronormativity and Biphobia,” *Journal of Bisexuality* 11, nos. 2-3 (2011): 229.

<sup>21</sup> Callis “Butler and Foucault,”; Monro et al., “Is Bisexuality Invisible?”

<sup>22</sup> Breanne Fahs, “Compulsory Bisexuality?: The Challenges of Modern Sexual Fluidity,” *Journal of Bisexuality* 9, nos. 3-4 (2009): 432.

<sup>23</sup> Autumn Elizabeth, “Challenging the Binary: Sexual Identity That Is Not Duality,” *Journal of Bisexuality* 13, no. 3 (2013).

<sup>24</sup> Callis, “The Black Sheep of the Pink Flock,” 93.

<sup>25</sup> Andrea Pennasilico and Anna Lisa Amodeo, “The Invisibles: Biphobia, Bisexual Erasure and Their Impact on Mental Health,” *PuntOorg International Journal* 4, no. 1 (2019): 22.

<sup>26</sup> Robyn Ochs, *Getting Bi: Voices of Bisexuals Around the World* (Boston, MA: Bisexual Resource Centre, 2009): 9.

<sup>27</sup> Klesse, “Shady Characters,” 231.

<sup>28</sup> Steven Angelides, *A History of Bisexuality* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

<sup>29</sup> Ulrich Gooß, “Concepts of Bisexuality,” *Journal of Bisexuality* 8, no. 1 (2008).

<sup>30</sup> MacDowall, “Historicising Contemporary Bisexuality.”

## Early Sexuality Studies

Bisexuality has had at least three different uses, describing sex, gender, and sexuality respectively.<sup>31</sup> The turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century saw a new model of human sexuality that determined there were fundamental biological differences between men and women; bisexuality described individuals with male and female reproductive organs.<sup>32</sup> Concurrently, the development of psychoanalysis – the study of the unconscious – influenced early sexology; this largely focused on sexual deviance, specifically male homosexuality.<sup>33</sup> Bisexuality in this instance was understood as a stage of development: Sigmund Freud argued that everyone is born with bisexual “potential” and that people become heterosexual or homosexual as they mature.<sup>34</sup> Bisexuality described both gender and sexuality in this conceptualisation, as homosexuals were considered to be “inverts” of heterosexuals because of their sexual preference, and it was thought that homosexuals adopted the gender role of the opposite sex.<sup>35</sup> Early sexologists, to quote Callis, understood bisexuality “as some mixture of an anatomical condition (intersexuality) and a state of mind.”<sup>36</sup> Callis argues that because bisexuality was seen as an in-between state in both instances, rather than recognised autonomously, there was no “truth” to bisexuality. Bisexuality consequently did not witness a similar emergence of “reverse discourse” that homosexuality did, nor develop an identity movement at the same speed as lesbians and gays.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Lachlan MacDowall outlined the trajectory of “bisexuality” in Western Europe from the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. “Bisexuality” was first used in physiology to refer to forms of life that exhibited both male and female sexual characteristics – what we would today call “intersex”. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, bisexuality was used to describe a combination of behavioural traits i.e. an individual that could be both masculine and feminine in terms of self-expression. This is also the first time that bisexuality was used to describe sexual attraction to individuals of both sexes. In the 1980s, following the HIV/AIDS epidemic, bisexuality was divided into describing sexual attraction or identification, and sexual practice i.e. the act of having sexual relationships with men and women. See: MacDowall, “Historicising Contemporary Bisexuality,” 4.

<sup>32</sup> This is known as the “two-sex model”, in which the female is figured as the polar opposite to the male. Prior to this, the “one-sex model” dominated medical and philosophical understandings of anatomy. The “one-sex model” conceptualised the female as the lesser version of the male. The differences between male and female sex organs were recognised, but they were not thought to be significant. The “one-sex”/“two-sex model” was first discussed in sexologist and historian Thomas Lacquer’s *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (1990). See: MacDowall, “Historicising Contemporary Bisexuality,” 10.

<sup>33</sup> Callis, “Playing with Butler and Foucault,” 223.

<sup>34</sup> Monro et al., “Is Bisexuality Invisible?” 670.

<sup>35</sup> Mary Bradford states “psychology has traditionally upheld the dichotomous view of sexual orientation. Until recently, heterosexuality has been viewed as the standard of normal functioning, with homosexuality seen as deviant behaviour to be examined and analysed.” See: Mary Bradford, “The Bisexual Experience”, *Journal of Bisexuality* 4, nos. 1-2 (2004): 9

<sup>36</sup> Callis, “Playing with Butler and Foucault,” 224.

<sup>37</sup> Erickson-Schroth and Mitchell, “Queering Queer Theory,” 303.

<sup>38</sup> Callis, “Playing with Butler and Foucault,” 223.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 225.

### *The 1970s: Bisexuality in Sexuality Studies*

The seminal work of sexologists Alfred Kinsey, Wardell Pomeroy and Clyde Martin were published in two books on human sexual behaviour, *Sexual Behaviour in the Human Male* (1948) and *Sexual Behaviour in the Human Female* (1953). The publications discussed the results of one of the largest studies of human sexuality ever undertaken, in which the researchers measured sexuality on the “Kinsey Scale”, which positioned individuals along a continuum of exclusive heterosexuality (0) to exclusive homosexuality (6).<sup>40</sup> “Bisexual” described those who were neither heterosexual nor homosexual.<sup>42</sup> This was the first time sexuality was understood as fluid and diverse, rather than fixed.<sup>43</sup> However, the Kinsey Scale is not without criticism, particularly because it referred to all those who ranked between (1) and (5) as “bisexual”, ignoring the heterogeneity of sexual attraction within the group.<sup>44</sup> It has also been criticised for framing sexuality as a spectrum between two poles of heterosexuality and homosexuality, implying that those sexualities that fall between the two are somehow a blend of heterosexuality and homosexuality, rather than their own distinct sexuality.<sup>45</sup> Nevertheless, there is consensus among historians that Kinsey et al.’s work, alongside the homophile movement of the 1950s, inspired the gay rights movement of the 1960s, in which bisexuals were involved.<sup>46</sup><sup>47</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Terry Evans, “Bisexuality,” *Journal of Bisexuality* 3, no. 2 (2003): 96; Sarah Corey, “All Bi Myself: Analyzing Television’s Presentation of Female Bisexuality,” *Journal of Bisexuality* 17, no. 2 (2017): 197.

<sup>41</sup> The Kinsey Scale was a self-report that required participants to rate their sexual behaviour and interests based on experience. Categories 1 to 5 identified individuals with varying levels of same- and other-sex attraction, and also included an “X” to account for those who had “no sexual contacts or reactions,” which we would now refer to as asexual. See: M. Paz Galupo, Kyle S. Davis, Ashley L. Gryniewicz and Renae C. Mitchell, “Conceptualisations of Sexual Orientation Identity Among Sexual Minorities: Patterns Across Sexual and Gender Identity,” *Journal of Bisexuality* 14, nos. 3-4 (2014): 347.

<sup>42</sup> Corey, “All Bi Myself,” 197.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 197.

<sup>44</sup> Galupo et al., “Conceptualization of Sexual Orientation Among Sexual Minorities,” 434.

<sup>44</sup> Pennasilico and Amodeo, “The Invisi\_les,” 22.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> Pennasilico and Amodeo, “The Invisi\_les,” 22.

<sup>47</sup> “Homophile,” meaning “loving the same,” is a dated term for homosexuality. The homophile movement took place during the 1950s, after lesbians and gays started to formally organise in an effort to address the discrimination they faced from the authorities. One well known example of a homophile group was the Mattachine Society, which was founded in Los Angeles, USA, in 1950. “Homophile” fell out of circulation with the emergence of the gay liberation movement in the 1960s, and the introduction of new terminology such as gay, lesbian and bisexual.

Many gay and lesbian groups within the gay rights movement relied heavily on strict identity politics in their fight for equality.<sup>48</sup> In effort to strengthen their claims, some activists adopted an “ethnicity model” of homosexuality, framing sexuality as a fixed category.<sup>50</sup> Identity politics such as this have been criticised for various reasons, namely that it creates a binary split between “us” and “them” (in this case, “homosexual” and “heterosexual”) that ignores the intersectional nature of an individual’s identity.<sup>51</sup> Consequently, the gay liberation movement was structured around gay identity and gay pride – excluding bisexuality.<sup>52</sup> Representing a sexual fluidity that contradicted the essentialist model of sexuality adopted by assimilationist activists, bisexuals were accused of “polluting” the movement.<sup>53</sup> Bisexual politics thus evolved predominantly in reaction to mainstream gay and lesbian activism, resulting in the emergence of the bisexual movement in the late 1970s that was mostly isolated from predominant gay liberation.<sup>55</sup> Bisexual politics is “inherently problematic” because it paradoxically relies on identity politics to bolster their claims for recognition while revealing the limits of the practice through bisexuality’s ambiguous nature.<sup>57</sup> Feminist theorist Liz Highleyman recognised this contradiction, asking whether the goal of the bisexual movement should be to “build a strong, coherent movement based on sexual identity, or to break down identity-based distinctions altogether?”<sup>58</sup> Bisexuals are divided on identity politics for this reason.<sup>59</sup> This debate is prevalent in Chapter 3.

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<sup>48</sup> Gammon and Isgro, “Troubling the Canon,” 162.

<sup>49</sup> Callis, “Playing with Butler and Foucault,” 217.

<sup>50</sup> Kirsten McLean, “Inside, Outside, Nowhere,” 67.

<sup>51</sup> “Intersectionality”, coined by the Black feminist lawyer Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989, describes how different aspects of an individual’s social and political identities, such as their gender, race, class, sexuality etc. intersect to create specific forms of discrimination and privilege.

<sup>52</sup> Gammon and Isgro, “Troubling the Canon,” 170.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Assimilationist politics was a strategy adopted during the Civil Rights Movement, which advocated for the incorporation and assimilation of differing racial and cultural groups in society. Politics of assimilation has been accused of simply expanding the status quo to include the more privileged members of marginal groups, while those most vulnerable continue to be marginalised and oppressed. See: Cathy Cohen, “Punks, Bulldaggers and Welfare Queens,” *GLQ* 3 (1997): 443.

<sup>55</sup> Gammon and Isgro, “Troubling the Canon,” 167.

<sup>56</sup> Early examples of bisexual organisations in the USA include “The National Bisexual Liberation Group” (founded in New York City in 1972), “The Bi Forum” (New York City, 1975), the “Bisexual Centre” (San Francisco, 1976) and “Bi Ways” (Chicago, 1978). See: Robyn Ochs and Liz Highleyman, “Bisexual Movement,” in *Lesbian Histories and Cultures: An Encyclopedia*, (ed.) Bonnie Zimmerman (New York: Garland, 2000): 112-114. The UK’s first Bisexuality Conference was held in December 1984; Kate Fearnely (interviewee) established the Edinburgh Bisexual Group in the early 1980s.

<sup>57</sup> Margaret McLaren, *Feminism, Foucault and Embodied Subjectivity* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2002): 135.

<sup>58</sup> Liz Highleyman, “Identities and Ideas: Strategies for Bisexuals,” in *Bisexual Politics: Theories, Queries and Visions*, (ed.) Naomi Tucker (New York: Haworth Press, 1995): 73.

<sup>59</sup> Katkryn G. Burrill, “Queering Bisexuality,” *Journal of Bisexuality* 2, nos. 2-3 (2001): 101-3.

A handful of scholars recognised the trend of bisexual marginalisation in theory and practice, writing about bisexuality in the 1970s.<sup>60</sup> Examples include Mead (1975), who explored the social constraints of societies and their effects on bisexual actions and identities, and Blumstein and Schwartz (1977), who discussed the sexual actions of self-identified bisexuals.<sup>61</sup> Typically done through comprehensive studies of bisexual experience, these initial studies focused on promoting bisexual visibility and dispelling negative attitudes about bisexuals – two key themes of bisexuality scholarship.<sup>62</sup>

### *Bi-Negativity/Biphobia*

April Callis argues the hostility bisexuals face is “perhaps the most written about theme” in bisexuality studies.<sup>63</sup> Sometimes referred to as “biphobia” (I discuss the nuances of the terms in Chapter 3), “bi-negativity” describes “the pervasive stereotypes and negative attitudes that bisexual men and women encounter as a result of their sexual identity.”<sup>64</sup> Bi-negativity operates through multiple oppressive practices, including violence, discrimination, epistemic erasure and stereotypes.<sup>65</sup> These stereotypes concern bisexuality generally, including: bisexuals are in denial/confused about their “real” sexuality (heterosexual or homosexual); bisexuality is transitional, and; bisexuals are hypersexual and incapable of monogamy.<sup>66</sup> Other stereotypes are particularly prevalent within the homosexual community, such as bisexuals benefit from “heterosexual privilege” and; bisexuals are damaging to the gay rights movement.<sup>67,68</sup> Bisexuality studies have analysed various aspects of bi-negativity and its consequences. For example, recent scholarship explored the impact anti-bisexual attitudes have on bisexuals’ mental health, such as Roberts et. al (2015) and McLaren and Castillo (2020).<sup>69</sup> Informed by minority stress theory, their findings suggest the bisexual community generally has poorer mental and physical health than other groups because of the dual bi-negativity bisexuals face

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<sup>60</sup> Gooß, “Concepts of Bisexuality,” 9.

<sup>61</sup> Callis, “Playing with Butler and Foucault,” 217.

<sup>62</sup> Pennington, “Bisexuals “Doing Gender” in Romantic Relationships,” 38.

<sup>63</sup> Callis, “The Black Sheep of the Pink Flock,” 85.

<sup>64</sup> Kwok et al., “Bisexual-Identifying Women’s Relationship Expectations,” 3.

<sup>65</sup> Klesse, “Shady Characters,” 234.

<sup>66</sup> Callis, “The Black Sheep of the Pink Flock,” 87; McLean, “Inside, Outside, Nowhere,” 66; Kwok et al., “Bisexual-Identifying Women’s Relationship Expectations,” 2.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> “Heterosexual privilege” describes the advantages that heterosexual individuals receive purely because they are heterosexual. Heterosexual privilege relates to heteronormativity.

<sup>69</sup> Tangela S. Roberts, Sharon G. Horne, and William T. Hoyt, “Between a Gay and a Straight Place: Bisexual Individuals’ Experiences with Monosexism,” *Journal of Bisexuality* 15, no. 4 (2015); McLaren and Castillo, “What About Me?”

from the heterosexual and lesbian/gay communities.<sup>70</sup> Other scholars have explored the significance of a bisexuals' gender in their experiences of bi-negativity. Callis and Bradford (2004) explored male-orientated biphobia, finding that public perception associated bisexual men with the spread of HIV/AIDS in the straight community, and that bisexual men were thought to "actually" be gay – and not real.<sup>72</sup> Similarly, Callis argues that female bisexuality has been illegitimated through practices like "performative bisexuality", leading to bisexual women being seen as "trendy" and again artificial.<sup>73</sup> Female-orientated bi-negativity is particularly prevalent within lesbian communities, particularly among radical/lesbian feminists. I have already explained why assimilationist lesbians/gays were hostile to bisexuality: bisexuality threatened their identity-based politics. I will first address how this hostility played out in radical/lesbian feminist discourse, before turning to "the epistemic contract of bisexual erasure."

### *The 1980s: Lesbian and Gay Studies and Radical/Lesbian Feminism*

The late 1970s and 1980s witnessed an epistemological shift in sexuality studies. Scholars, inspired by the identity politics of the 1960s, began to conceptualise gays and lesbians as "quasi-ethnic" communities, paralleling African-Americans and other racialised minority communities.<sup>75</sup> The institutionalisation of lesbian and gay studies in the 1980s saw the establishment of a new scholarly community – partly due to the homophobia lesbian/gay scholars faced within academia – focused on tackling heterosexism (discrimination against non-heterosexual people).<sup>76</sup> Perhaps unsurprisingly, given its roots in mainstream gay liberation and the misconception that bisexuals experience "heterosexual privilege", the discipline tended to concentrate exclusively on lesbian and gay identities and politics, rather than a more inclusive LGBT focus, contributing to the marginalisation of bisexuality.<sup>77</sup> Similar to the consequences of bisexuality in lesbian and gay identity politics, the introduction of

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<sup>70</sup> Kwok et al., "Bisexual-Identifying Women's Relationship Expectations," 3.

<sup>71</sup> Minority stress describes a chronic form of stress that stigmatised minority groups experience. Minority stress theory maintains that the stress is a result of numerous factors, such as prejudice or discrimination, or socioeconomic status. These prejudices lead to stress responses such as high blood pressure and anxiety, which results in poor mental and physical health. See: Pennasilico and Amodeo, "The Invisi\_les," 25.

<sup>72</sup> Callis, "The Black Sheep of the Pink Flock," 84; Bradford, "The Bisexual Experience," 15.

<sup>73</sup> Callis, "The Black Sheep of the Pink Flock," 85.

<sup>74</sup> "Performative bisexuality" is described by Breanne Fahs as heterosexual women "engaging in homoerotic acts with other women, usually in front of men and most often in the context of social settings like frat parties, bars, clubs and other crowded sexualised spaces..." See: Fahs, "Compulsory Bisexuality?," 432.

<sup>75</sup> Callis, "Playing with Butler and Foucault," 215.

<sup>76</sup> Monro et al., "Is Bisexuality Invisible?" 670.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 671.

bisexuality in institutionalised lesbian and gay studies would have complicated their arguments – meaning bisexuality was largely ignored. The tactics adopted by these scholars illustrate another key theme within sexuality scholarship: bi-erasure. “Bisexual erasure” refers to “the ways that bisexuality as a mature form of desire is deferred, elided, or made invisible.”<sup>78</sup> Bi-erasure is evident within radical/lesbian feminism, which viewed bisexual women in contempt of the goals of feminism by maintaining a commitment to the patriarchy.<sup>79</sup> These branches of feminism, with their critique of heteropatriarchy, co-opted “behavioural bisexuality”.<sup>80</sup> In her 1980 essay, “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence,” feminist theorist Adrienne Rich argued that heterosexuality was not intrinsic to human nature, but an institution imposed upon women – and that all women should separate from men and engage in some form of lesbian relationship instead.<sup>82</sup> By framing female sexuality in this way, Rich and other radical/lesbian feminists exploited bisexuality, removing bisexual women’s agency in their attraction to men and dismissing it merely as a consequence of heteropatriarchy rather than genuine plurisexual attraction. Both institutionalised lesbian and gay theory and radical/lesbian feminism therefore contributed to the erasure of bisexuality.

### “The Epistemic Contract of Bisexual Erasure”

In his influential work, legal scholar Kenji Yoshino (2000) posited that bisexuality remains practically invisible in existing sexuality studies despite evidence suggesting that bisexuals exist in numbers equal to or higher than homosexuals.<sup>83</sup> By conducting online searches of “homosexuality” and “bisexuality” in popular newspapers and magazines, Yoshino demonstrated the under-representation of bisexuality.<sup>84</sup> Yoshino hypothesised that bisexuals were invisible as a result of deliberate erasure, rather than nonexistence – which the above discussion supports.<sup>85</sup> He described this as the “epistemic contract of bisexual erasure”,

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<sup>78</sup> MacDowall, “Historicising Contemporary Bisexuality,” 4.

<sup>79</sup> McLean, “Inside, Outside, Nowhere,” 66.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> By “behavioural bisexuality”, I am referring to the radical/lesbian feminist argument that heterosexual women should avoid romantic and sexual relationships with men – as to do so would be supporting the patriarchy – and instead pursue romantic and sexual relationships with women as an alternative.

<sup>82</sup> Adrienne Rich, “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence,” *Signs* 5, no. 4 (1980).

<sup>83</sup> Yoshino, “The Epistemic Contract,” 361.

<sup>84</sup> Between 1990 and 1999, the *LA Times*, for example, mentioned “homosexuality” in 2790 documents compared to “bisexuality” in 127. That is over 23 times more. See: Ibid. Monro et al. (2015) adopted a similar approach to academic texts and found that there was a significant disparity in more than half of the analysed texts. See: Monro et al., “Is Bisexuality Invisible?” 669.

<sup>85</sup> Yoshino, “The Epistemic Contract,” 361.



asserting that heterosexuals and homosexuals have “shared investment” and “overlapping political interests” in keeping bisexuality invisible.<sup>86</sup> Central to Yoshino’s argument is that heterosexuals and homosexuals benefit from monosexism. Dominating Western culture, monosexism – a binary social construction of sexuality – assumes there are only two genders (male/female), and that an individual is attracted exclusively to the same or “opposite” gender (heterosexual/homosexual).<sup>88</sup> Central to monosexism is the primacy of gender in sexual object choice: sexuality is determined by the gender that the individual is attracted to.<sup>89</sup> Bisexuality threatens the “monosexual paradigm” – coined by bisexual Maria Blasingame to describe lesbians/gays who ignored the consequences of the heterosexual/homosexual binary for bisexuals – because bisexuals are not exclusively attracted to a single gender.<sup>90</sup> Yoshino separates the investments in bi-erasure that “self-identified straights” and “self-identified gays” have into three categories: an interest in stabilising sexual orientation (monosexism); an interest in retaining the importance of sex as a metric of differentiation in society (which bisexuality threatens because it questions the predominance of sex as a social identity category), and; an interest in defending monogamy (as studies have shown bisexuals are more likely see non-monogamy as an ideal compared to monosexuals).<sup>91</sup> Yoshino sub-divides these categories into the interests of “only straights”, “only gays”, and both.<sup>93</sup> In exploring why each group shares these investments – despite having different motivations – Yoshino provides a convincing argument on bi-erasure, demonstrating how both heterosexuals and homosexuals benefit from the current social order and share a sustained interest in erasing bisexuality.

### *Bi-Invisibility*

While Yoshino argues that bisexual invisibility is a result of “deliberate erasure” rather than nonexistence, it should be acknowledged that bisexuality can be invisibilised in ways

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<sup>86</sup> Erickson-Schroth and Mitchell, “Queering Queer Theory,” 301

<sup>87</sup> Yoshino, “The Epistemic Contract,” 362.

<sup>88</sup> Kwok et al., “Bisexual-Identifying Women’s Relationship Expectations,” 3.

<sup>89</sup> Teresa de Lauretis, “Queer Theory: Lesbian and Gay Sexualities,” *Differences* 3, no. 2 (1991): xiv; Maria Pramaggiore, “BI-introduction I: Epistemologies of the Fence,” in *RePresenting Bisexualities: Subjects and Cultures of Fluid Desire*, (eds.) Donald E. Hall and Maria Pramaggiore (New York: NYU Press, 1996): 3.

<sup>90</sup> Brenda Marie Blasingame, “The Roots of Biphobia: Racism and Internalized Heterosexism,” in *Closer to Home: Bisexuality & Feminism*, (ed.) Elizabeth Reba Weise (Seattle: The Seal Press, 1992): 47; Erickson-Schroth and Mitchell, “Queering Queer Theory,” 313.

<sup>91</sup> Yoshino, “The Epistemic Contract,” 388-391.

<sup>92</sup> Tania Israel and Jonathan J. Mohr, “Attitudes Toward Bisexual Women and Men,” *Journal of Bisexuality* 4, nos. 1-2 (2004): 122.

<sup>93</sup> Yoshino, “The Epistemic Contract,” 399-429.

unspecific to bisexuality.<sup>94</sup> Michel Foucault's (1978) *The History of Sexuality* posits sexual discourse is a relatively recent development in Western discourse.<sup>95</sup> Before sexologists tried to understand sexual deviance through the existence of the male homosexual, non-heterosexualities were ignored completely.<sup>96</sup> Historical bi-invisibility can partly be explained as a consequence of the universal erasure of sexuality and the deliberate ignorance adopted towards same-sex desire.<sup>97</sup> Additionally, beyond scholarship, non-heterosexual discrimination continues to exist. That said, Yoshino argues there is a form of deliberate social invisibilisation specific to bisexuals: "bisexual invisibility".<sup>98</sup> Kwok et al. argues bi-invisibility operates through three key mechanisms: the absence/silencing of bisexual voices (which I have already addressed); the assumptions made about a bisexual individual's sexuality based on the gender of their partner, and; the absorption of bisexual-identifying people under the LGBTQ+ umbrella.<sup>99</sup> This absorption is evident in sexuality scholarship, which tends to combine bisexual individuals with lesbian and gay samples, contributing to a misrepresentation of bisexual voices in research.<sup>100</sup>

Various scholars, such as Bradford (2004), Schroth and Mitchell (2009), Ochs (2009; 2011), and Kwok et al. (2020), explore how bisexuals are rarely "seen", arguing the presence of a partner typically leads to assumptions that the bisexual person is heterosexual or lesbian/gay.<sup>101</sup> This invisibility is reinforced, according to Klesse, by people's tendency to actively "forget" a non-partnered bisexual's sexuality.<sup>102</sup> Evans argues being bisexual is problematised by the absence of strong bisexual culture and the dominance of monosexual cultures.<sup>103</sup> A common question among bisexuality scholars is how one is supposed to "perform" their bisexuality, as it is likely the individual will be assumed homosexual or heterosexual given the current monosexual paradigm. Additionally, bisexuals worry that in order to be recognised as bisexual, they have to play directly into common stereotypes about bisexuality – perpetuating bi-negativity.<sup>104</sup> This is discussed in Chapter 3. Suzanne Pennington (2009) explored the

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Michel Foucault, "Part One: We 'Other Victorians'," in *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction, Volume 1* (New York: Vintage, trans. Robert Hurley, 1990).

<sup>96</sup> Monro et al., "Is Bisexuality Invisible?," 670.

<sup>97</sup> Yoshino, "The Epistemic Contract," 365-367.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Kwok et al., "Bisexual-Identifying Women's Relationship Expectations," 3.

<sup>100</sup> Roberts et al., "Between a Gay and a Straight Place," 558.

<sup>101</sup> Bradford, "The Bisexual Experience," 14.

<sup>102</sup> Klesse, "Shady Characters," 232.

<sup>103</sup> Evans, "Bisexuality," 93.

<sup>104</sup> Callis, "Playing with Butler and Foucault," 227-8; Whitney, "Cyborgs Among Us," 112.

performative element of bisexuality – not to be confused with the “performative bisexuality” previously discussed – investigating how bisexual individuals signal their sexuality. She furthered this by interrogating how bisexual-identifying individuals perform their gender while in a relationship, noting that they were more likely to conform to gender norms while in “opposite”-gender relationships.<sup>105</sup> This ability of bisexual individuals to subvert gender norms depending on their relationship status reveals the link between gender and sexuality, particularly heteronormativity’s reliance on the sex binary, and highlights the constructed nature of sex, gender and sexuality binaries. It also demonstrates the deconstructive potential of bisexuality.<sup>106</sup>

### *The 1990s: Queer Theory*

Despite being a topic of scientific inquiry since the late 1970s, only in the 1990s was a distinct bisexuality scholarship established, with a spate of publications about bisexuality – primarily from the USA and Britain – appearing in the 1990s.<sup>107</sup><sup>108</sup> Like the handful of studies conducted in the 1970s, this empirical wave of research focused on bi-negativity and bi-invisibility. Rust (1993) provided the first study to evaluate lesbian women’s beliefs about bisexual women, while Eliason (1997) conducted a survey asking participants to agree/disagree with 23 statements describing common bisexuality stereotypes.<sup>109</sup> Concurrently, queer theory emerged as an academic discipline in the 1990s, focusing on the constructed nature of gender and sexual identities and categorisations.<sup>110</sup> Specifically, it sought to break down existing identity categories, bringing greater fluidity to sex and gender while also challenging heterosexual/homosexual dualism.<sup>111</sup> Queer theory was strongly influenced by social

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<sup>105</sup> Pennington argued that there is a highly gendered dynamic within monogamous heterosexual relationships. She based her argument off the work of Judith Butler, who argued that categories of sex and gender are socially constructed and are dependent on one another. By exploring the romantic relationships of bisexual men and women, Pennington explored how this traditional gender dynamic was affected by bisexuality; she argued that bisexuals were more likely to conform to traditional gender norms when in a other-gender relationship and that they were more likely to subvert these norms when in a same-gender relationship. She concluded that “the social location of this identity category situates bisexual women and men in unscripted gender terrain.” See: Pennington, “Bisexuals Doing Gender,” 33-43; 48.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Callis, “The Black Sheep of the Pink Flock,” 85.

<sup>108</sup> Examples include Loraine Hutchins and Lani Ka’ahumanu (eds.), *Bi Any Other Name: Bisexual People Speak Out* (1991); Elizabeth Weise (ed.), *Closer to Home: Bisexuality and Feminism* (1993); Naomi Tucker (ed.), *Bisexual Politics: Theories, Queries and Visions* (1996); and, Marjorie Garber (ed.), *Vice Versa: Bisexuality and Eroticism of Everyday Life* (1996). See: McLaren, *Feminism, Foucault and Embodied Subjectivity*, 135-6.

<sup>109</sup> Callis, “Playing with Butler and Foucault,” 217.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 215.

<sup>111</sup> Pennington, “Bisexuals “Doing Gender,”” 39.

constructionism, in which Yoshino's work is grounded. Social constructionism, which evolved during the 1980s and 1990s, theorised that classifications such as "homosexual" were products of specific histories and cultures, rather than universal truths.<sup>112</sup> Simultaneously, some feminist theorists began to question the validity of "woman" as an identity category, noting how language and science were used to legitimise cultural understandings of gender.<sup>113</sup> Queer theory and bisexuality scholarship therefore have a lot in common: both are rooted in lesbian and gay scholarship and feminist theory, and influenced by social constructionism and postmodernism; each discipline also focus on the deconstruction of binaries. The inclusion of bisexuality, which challenges both the natural dichotomies of sexuality and gender, within queer theory could undeniably strengthen the discipline. However, there remains a "curious gap" in queer theory on the subject, for which it has received justified criticism.<sup>114</sup>

Scholars have accounted for this gap in different ways. Callis (2009) argued that bisexuality has been ignored by queer theorists because it has been wrongly understood as a mix of homosexuality and heterosexuality – existing within the sexuality binary.<sup>115</sup> Callis cites the seminal works of Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* (1990/2006) and Michel Foucault's *The History of Sexuality* (1978) to demonstrate her point. More prominently, Erickson-Schroth and Mitchell (2009) maintain that bisexuality is ignored because it is "fundamentally unsettling to the hegemonic institution of heterosexuality and homosexuality" that queer theory relies on.<sup>116</sup> This position is supported by Steinman (2001) and Sullivan (2003), who argue that queer theory's dependency on the homosexual to expose heteronormativity has marginalised other sexual possibilities, playing into the binary. Erickson-Schroth and Mitchell, along with other theorists such as Feldman (2009) and MacDowall (2009), worked with Eve Sedgwick's *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990) to illustrate their arguments, leading Erickson-Schroth and Mitchell to conclude that an inclusion of bisexuality would require the "queering of queer theory."<sup>117</sup> I will return to the practice of "queering" queer theory in the second section of this chapter, as the methods adopted by bisexuality scholars to use bisexuality in queer theorising inform the basis of my thesis.

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<sup>112</sup> Callis, "Playing with Butler and Foucault," 216.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> Erickson-Schroth and Mitchell, "Queering Queer Theory," 312.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 297.

## Post-2000

From around 2000, lesbian and gay studies broadened the discipline to include other non-normative groups; scholarship also pivoted from a queer and poststructuralist lens to address wider LGBTQ issues. Despite this, LGBTQ texts continue to ignore bisexuality.<sup>118</sup> This was evident in conducting research for this literature review: the majority of works cited are taken from one bisexuality-specific publication, *The Journal of Bisexuality*, established in 1999. The founding year of the publication supports the argument that a broadening of sexuality studies occurred to an extent at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century; however, the fact that the majority of the cited works come from one publication indicates other facets of sexuality scholarship still neglect bisexuality. The *Journal* provides a clear roadmap of bisexuality scholarship since its inception, with earlier publications focusing on anecdotal studies of bisexual subjectivity (Bradford, 2004; Ochs, 2009; 2011), attempts to historicise “bisexuality” terminologically (Angelides, 2001; Gooß, 2008; MacDowall, 2009), and queer theory’s failure to address bisexuality (Callis, 2009; Erickson-Schroth and Mitchell, 2009; Feldman, 2009). In approximately the last ten years, bisexuality scholarship has adopted a more intersectional approach, focusing on the influence of gender – both the bisexual individual’s own and their partner(s) – in relationships (Fahs, 2009; Alarie and Gaudet, 2013) and the invisibility of bisexual people of colour (Kwok et al., 2020).<sup>119</sup> Other issues are tackled, such as mental health (McLean, 2008; Roberts et al., 2015; Pennasilico and Amodeo, 2019) and the (mis)representation of bisexuality in the media (Corey, 2017; Gonzalez, Ramirez and Galupo, 2017).<sup>120</sup>

## Relevance of Literature Review

This literature review demonstrates the sustained erasure – through various methods – of bisexuality in sexuality studies. Undeniably, the ambiguous definition of “bisexuality” causes confusion regarding who “counts” as bisexual, resulting in other plurisexual identities claiming to be more inclusive. Additionally, the complicated performative nature of bisexuality (in

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<sup>118</sup> Monro et al., “Is Bisexuality Invisible?” 672.

<sup>119</sup> Milaine Alarie and Stéphanie Gaudet, ““I Don’t Know If She Is Bisexual or If She Just Wants to Get Attention”: Analyzing the Various Mechanisms Through Which Emerging Adults Invisibilise Bisexuality,” *Journal of Bisexuality* 13, no. 2 (2013).

<sup>120</sup> Kirsten A. Gonzalez, Johanna L. Ramirez and M.P. Galupo, ““I was and still am”: Narratives of Bisexual Marking in the #StillBisexual Campaign,” *Sexuality and Culture* 21 (2017).

which an individual is assumed straight or lesbian/gay) means that bisexuals are invisible in monosexist society. This has made it difficult to establish a strong bisexual community that could dispel the negative stereotypes surrounding bisexuality and tackle biphobia. Nevertheless, it is evident that both the heterosexual and homosexual communities have “shared investment in [bisexual] erasure”, as bisexuality threatens the monosexist culture both straights and lesbians/gays benefit from. Furthermore, the failure of queer theory to explore bisexuality as a method of inquiry, despite bisexuality raising important questions about the construction of sexuality and gender, also points to deliberate erasure – perhaps because bisexuality would reveal queer theory’s own reliance on the binaries it claims to interrogate. Even in the last twenty years, as lesbian and gay studies has widened its focus to broader LGBTQ issues, bisexuality continues to be ignored – suggesting that bisexuality’s absence from assorted subsects of sexuality scholarship is not merely an oversight, but a deliberate practice employed for multiple motivations. This review traces the historical trajectory of bisexuality in sexual minority communities and sexuality scholarship, revealing the many obstacles that bisexuality scholars face when trying to justify their work.

## **1.2. Conceptual Tools**

This section regards the key theories and concepts – the conceptual tools – that inform the theoretical framework of this thesis. First, I review why bisexuality scholars are attempting to “queer” queer theory, exploring the position that queer theorists ignore bisexuality because queer theory relies on the heterosexual/homosexual binary. I consider their argument that the inclusion of bisexuality in queer theory would enable the discipline to transcend the sexuality binary. I then describe the primary method adopted by bisexuality scholars to add bisexuality to the canon of queer theory: “bisexual epistemologies”. I provide a critique of this method, namely that the practice reduces bisexuality to a deconstructive tool of analysis that ignores bisexual existence: *being* bisexual. I conclude this section by offering an overview of the anthropological concept of liminality, and my justification for applying it to bisexuality. I argue that understanding bisexuality as a liminal space encompasses both bisexuality as a lived identity/subject position and bisexuality as an epistemological perspective, bettering the bisexuality’s contribution to queer theory.

### “Queering” Queer Theory

Laura Erickson-Schroth and Jennifer Mitchell argue “the continued erasure of bisexuality, by queer scholars in addition to mainstream critics, reveals that queer theory has not yet moved beyond its position as a homosexual opponent to heterosexuality...”<sup>121</sup> “Queer theory” was coined in 1990 when Italian feminist and film theorist Teresa de Lauretis organised a conference entitled, “Queer Theory: Lesbian and Gay Sexualities”.<sup>122</sup><sup>123</sup> The conference aimed to theorise how lesbian and gay sexualities could provide “forms of resistance to cultural homogenisation”.<sup>124</sup> de Lauretis argued that homosexuality no longer existed on the fringes of culture, defined in contrast to the “dominant, stable form” of heterosexuality; rather, homosexuality was now recognised as an autonomous sexuality.<sup>125</sup> Homosexuality thus challenged heteronormativity. Other theorists made similar arguments prior to de Lauretis coining “queer theory”, most notably Michel Foucault, Diana Fuss, Eve Sedgwick and Judith Butler.<sup>126</sup> Despite differences in their arguments, these scholars agreed that gender and sexuality were socially constructed, contradicting the essentialist argument that sex, gender and sexuality were biologically determined.<sup>127</sup> Queer theory emerged in the 1990s as a segment of academia grounded within social constructionism. Unlike de Lauretis, queer theory sought to transcend the heterosexual/homosexual binary – which many scholars feel queer theory failed to do.<sup>128</sup> de Lauretis herself abandoned the term, claiming it was “politically and critically ineffectual.”<sup>129</sup> While maintaining that sexuality was an important societal construction, de Lauretis criticised the “academic cottage industry driven by queer theory.”<sup>130</sup>

Queer theory has been criticised for various reasons, such as its tendency to overlook issues of race and class, elevating sexuality to the sole identity category.<sup>131</sup> Feminist theorist Cathy

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<sup>121</sup> Erickson-Schroth and Mitchell, “Queering Queer Theory,” 297.

<sup>122</sup> de Lauretis, “Queer Theory,” iii.

<sup>123</sup> The conference was held at the University of California, Santa Cruz. de Lauretis wanted to address how current discourses regarding homosexuality failed to recognise the relationship between race, gender and sexuality, and how homosexuality may be expressed differently in different contexts. See: de Lauretis, “Queer Theory,” iii.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> Maria Gurevich, Helen Bailey & Jo Bower, “Querying Theory and Politics: The Epistemic (Dis)Location of Bisexuality within Queer Theory,” *Journal of Bisexuality* 9, nos. 3-4 (2009): 241.

<sup>127</sup> Callis, “Playing with Butler and Foucault,” 215; Gurevich et al., “Querying Theory and Politics,” 244.

<sup>128</sup> Callis, “Playing with Butler and Foucault,” 215-216.

<sup>129</sup> Gurevich et al. “Querying Theory and Politics,” 241.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Callis, “Playing with Butler and Foucault,” 216.

Cohen's persuasive essay, "Punks, Bulldaggers and Welfare Queens," (1997) supports this, arguing queer politics failed to reach its transformative potential because it did not consider how power operates through intersecting identity categories.<sup>132</sup> Erickson-Schroth and Mitchell argue that in its attempt to reveal the constructed nature of gender and sexuality, queer theory relies on the "marginalised sexual 'other'".<sup>133</sup> Rather than exploring the potential of various non-heterosexual sexualities, queer theory has "unfortunately come to theorise only homosexual identity."<sup>134</sup> This is evident in the failure of leading queer theorists such as Judith Butler and Eve Sedgwick to engage properly with bisexuality. Bisexuality scholar Stacey Young supports Erickson-Schroth and Mitchell, arguing that queer theory is "practically uniform in leaving the heterosexual/homosexual binarism undisturbed."<sup>135</sup> Young argues this is because "queer" is often used as a placeholder for "lesbian/gay" – connecting this to the relationship between queer theory and queer politics.<sup>136</sup> Emerging in the late 1980s, "queer politics" described a new "in-your-face" politics that challenged heteronormativity.<sup>137</sup><sup>138</sup> The derogatory slur was reclaimed by some sexual minority activists as an umbrella term for all non-heteronormative individuals, enabling a move away from the strict identity politics of gay liberation.<sup>139</sup> Queer theorist David Halperin defined "queer" as "whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant."<sup>140</sup> However, instead of providing an alternative to identity categorisation, "queer" became one of its own – often subsumed by lesbian/gay groups in attempts to sustain their ethnic-model of sexuality.<sup>141</sup> Rather than deconstructing the sexuality binary, queer theory created a new one: heterosexual versus "queer".<sup>142</sup> Consequently, bisexuals were similarly marginalised in queer politics as they had been in the gay liberation movement. Bisexuals were "not queer enough" because they sometimes pursued heteronormative relationships.<sup>143</sup> Influenced by queer politics, queer theory mirrored this marginalisation, resulting in the discipline's reliance on the heterosexual/homosexual binary.

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<sup>132</sup> Cohen, "Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens," 437-438.

<sup>133</sup> Erickson-Schroth and Mitchell, "Queering Queer Theory," 297.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

<sup>135</sup> Stacey Young, "Dichotomies and Displacement: Bisexuality in Queer Theory and Politics," in *Playing with Fire: Queer Politics, Queer Theories*, ed. Shane Phelan (New York: Routledge, 1996): 65.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>137</sup> Callis, "Playing with Butler and Foucault," 214.

<sup>138</sup> Prominent examples include "Queer Nation" and "ACT UP" (which "Queer Nation" stemmed from). These groups favoured direct action to confront discrimination and violence towards the LGBTQ community.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

<sup>140</sup> David M. Halperin, *St. Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1995): 62.

<sup>141</sup> Callis, "Playing with Butler and Foucault," 214; Katryn G. Burrill, "Queering Bisexuality," 100.

<sup>142</sup> Callis, "Playing with Butler and Foucault," 216.

<sup>143</sup> Blasingame, "The Roots of Biphobia," 42.



Adding bisexuality to queer theory would highlight how the discipline has challenged heterosexuality by juxtaposing it against homosexuality masked as “queer”.

### *Bisexual Epistemologies*

Bisexuality scholars argue that bisexuality’s addition to queer theory would greatly strengthen the discipline.<sup>144</sup> This is because bisexuality troubles gender and sexuality binaries by refusing to conform to monosexist notions of attraction and identity.<sup>145</sup> Bisexuality provides queer theory with the “ideal starting place” for deconstructing gendered and sexuality binaries.<sup>146</sup> Bisexuality theorists have tried to add bisexuality to queer theory through two main approaches: bisexuality as “universal” and “bisexual epistemologies”. Earlier attempts emphasised the “universal” nature of bisexuality, framing bisexuality as transcending the heterosexual/homosexual binary because it rejects fixed sexual object choice.<sup>147</sup> This argument was largely dismissed by sexuality scholars, including those focused on bisexuality, because it relied on conceptualising bisexuality as more “advanced” than heterosexuality or homosexuality.<sup>148</sup> Instead, bisexuality theorists suggest that bisexuality be positioned within the heterosexual/homosexual binary, as to do so reveals the constructed nature of society and the reliance of queer theory on heterosexual/homosexual dichotomisation.<sup>149</sup> In other words, bisexuality scholars argued for the use of bisexuality as an “epistemological vantage point” that enabled the deconstruction of sexuality and gender binaries.<sup>150</sup> This was first proposed by feminist theorist Elisabeth Däumer in 1992. Queer theorists adopted this method in subsequent years, including Maria Pramaggiore, who stated that bisexual epistemologies offered “ways of apprehending, organising and intervening in the world that refuse one-to-one correspondences between sex acts and identity...”<sup>151</sup> Digital theorist Jessa Lingel cautions such practice, arguing “theory that implements lived experiences as integral to hypothetical inquiry sets up [the] potential for objectification.”<sup>152</sup> Utilising behaviour as an analytical tool runs the risk of

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<sup>144</sup> Burrill, “Queering Bisexuality,” 95.

<sup>145</sup> Gurevich et al, “Querying Theory and Politics,” 236.

<sup>146</sup> Callis, “Playing with Butler and Foucault,” 219.

<sup>147</sup> Young, “Dichotomies and Displacement,” 52.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

<sup>150</sup> Däumer, “Queer Ethics,” 98.

<sup>151</sup> Maria Pramaggiore, “BI-introduction I: Epistemologies of the Fence,” in Donald E. Hall and Maria Pramaggiore, (eds.) *Representing Bisexualities: Subjects and Cultures of Fluid Desire* (New York: NYU Press, 1996): 3.

<sup>152</sup> Lingel, “Adjusting the Borders,” 383.

ignoring the lived reality of the subject.<sup>153</sup> This is evident in bisexuality and queer scholarship that approaches bisexuality from an epistemological perspective: bisexual reality is often ignored – erasing bisexual existence once again. According to Voss et al., the contribution of bisexuality to queer theory is limited because “the possibility of simultaneously inhabiting these positions [bisexuality as lived experience and as epistemological perspective] has been under-theorised.”<sup>154</sup> In order to fully recognise the potential of bisexuality in queer theory, “the particular knot of bi as stable identity; bi as umbrella for a set of practices; and bi as deconstructive tool” needs to be explored simultaneously.<sup>155</sup> I propose that understanding bisexuality as a liminal space achieves this. To do so ensures the lived reality of bisexuals is acknowledged, while also providing an epistemological lens through which to look at queer theory’s continued reliance on the heterosexual/homosexual binary.

### *Liminality*

The concept of “liminality” was introduced by folklorist Arnold van Gennep in *Les Rites de Passage* (1909).<sup>156</sup><sup>157</sup> Focusing on rites in small-scale societies, van Gennep determined that all rites of passage (“transitions”) consisted of three phases: 1) separation rites; 2) transition rites, and; 3) incorporation rites.<sup>158</sup> van Gennep described stage 2) as a “liminal period”, during which the individual “wavers between two worlds.”<sup>159</sup><sup>160</sup> van Gennep’s work received little attention following initially; only in 1957 (after his death) was “liminality” taken up again by Scottish anthropologist Victor Turner.<sup>161</sup>

Unlike van Gennep’s precise use of “liminality” to describe the middle stage of rituals, Turner, in *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (1969), focused less on the actualities of tribal transitions and instead on how people experienced ritual.<sup>162</sup> Turner understood liminality

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<sup>153</sup> Ibid., 382-383.

<sup>154</sup> Voss et al., “Embracing the “And”: Between Queer and Bisexual Theory,” 1606.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid., 1620

<sup>156</sup> Bjørn Thomassen, *Liminality and the Modern: Living Through the In-Between* (New York: Routledge, 2016): 3.

<sup>157</sup> “Liminality” stems from *limen*, Latin for “threshold”.

<sup>158</sup> van Gennep used the example of a boy transitioning from childhood to adulthood, during which the child was removed from their village as an adolescent and was then reincorporated into society as a man. See: Thomassen, *Liminality and the Modern*: 3.

<sup>159</sup> Stephen Bigger, “Victor Turner, Liminality, and Cultural Performance,” *Journal of Beliefs and Values* 30, no. 2 (2009): 209.

<sup>160</sup> Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 18.

<sup>161</sup> Thomassen, *Liminality and the Modern*, 3.

<sup>162</sup> Bigger, “Victor Turner, Liminality, and Cultural Performance,” 209-210.

as a “state of mind”, arguing that “liminal personae” (“threshold people”) “are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial.”<sup>163</sup> Turner argued that liminal personae “elude or slip through the network of classifications.”<sup>164</sup> By framing liminality within the context of experience, Turner “developed the concept to embrace all transitions and rituals everywhere.”<sup>165</sup> Turner, when discussing Western developed societies, differentiated between ritual for serious purpose (liminal) and recreational purposes (“liminoid”/“liminal-like”), such as theatre, during which the individual deliberately placed themselves “between fact and fiction.”<sup>167</sup> Furthermore, Turner contrasted “social structure” with “anti-structure”.<sup>168</sup> He argued that society was organised by “a multiplicity of structural ties” (e.g. caste and class), and that society was an “often hierarchical system of politico-legal-economic positions... separating men in terms of “more” or “less”.”<sup>169</sup> This describes “social structure”. “Anti-structure” describes “unstructured or rudimentarily structured and relatively undifferentiated comitatus, community, or even communion...”<sup>170</sup> Turner argued that anti-structure societies were liminal. Central to this was Turner’s reliance on *communitas* – an unstructured state in which all members of a community are equal, allowing them to share a common experience, typically a rite of passage.<sup>171</sup> Turner argued “*communitas* breaks in through the interstices of structure, in liminality; at the edges of structure, in marginality; and from beneath structure, in inferiority.”<sup>172</sup> *Communitas* could inspire “creative, ‘beyond-the-box’ approaches,” encouraging “bottom-up, multi-perspectival, democratic” endeavours.<sup>173</sup> Turner acknowledged “all sustained manifestations of *communitas* must appear as dangerous or anarchical” to those concerned with maintaining social structure.<sup>174</sup> Turner recognised the contradictory possibilities of liminality, which could simultaneously instill impassivity and inspire revolutionary reversals of power-structures.<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>163</sup> Bigger, “Victor Turner, Liminality and Cultural Performance,” 209-210; Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 359.

<sup>164</sup> E. Tristan Booth, “Queering QueerEye: The Stability of Gay Identity Confronts the Liminality of Trans Embodiment,” *Western Journal of Communication*, 75, no. 2 (2011): 186-188.

<sup>165</sup> Bigger, “Victor Turner, Liminality, and Cultural Performance,” 209.

<sup>166</sup> Thomassen, *Liminality and the Modern*, 5.

<sup>167</sup> Bigger, “Victor Turner, Liminality, and Cultural Performance,” 211.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid.

<sup>169</sup> Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 360.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid.

<sup>172</sup> Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 372.

<sup>173</sup> Bigger, “Victor Turner, Liminality, and Cultural Performance,” 212.

<sup>174</sup> Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 368.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid.

Turner's "liminality" is not without criticism. Stephen Bigger argued that Turner "took a precise concept... and adapted it into a general programme far removed from the intention of [van Gennep]" that "introduced a range of confusions."<sup>176</sup> J. Lowell Lewis supports this.<sup>177</sup> Bjørn Thomassen acknowledged the "perplexing" qualities of liminality, as it "involves a potentially unlimited freedom from any kind of structure" – acknowledging social structures exist – while involving "a peculiar kind of unsettling situation in which nothing really matters..."<sup>178</sup> Nevertheless, Turner's work was vital in directing attention to van Gennep's concept, and liminality remains prominent in both anthropology and popular culture today.<sup>179</sup>

### *Bisexuality as a Liminal Space*

Presently, liminality "relates to change in a single personality as well as social change and transition in large-scale settings; [tying] together the micro and the macro, operating from 'the middle'."<sup>180</sup> I will apply liminality to bisexuality for this reason, as liminality encompasses the dislocation of bisexuality at both levels, recognising the relationship between lived reality and sexuality scholarship. On a "micro" level, liminality encapsulates embodied bisexual subjectivity by describing their being "betwixt and between" the "straight" and LGBTQ+ communities.<sup>181</sup> At a "macro" level, I frame heterosexuality and queerness as diametrically opposed social structures, positioning bisexuality as the liminal anti-structure. Sexuality scholar have employed liminality before: Andrew Gorman-Murray argued that older gay men are "liminal subjects, skirting the thresholds of two social worlds simultaneously, but not fully present, not belonging to either."<sup>182</sup> Mandy Wilson described transgender existence as "a particular phase of liminality", during which "one's physical, behavioural and psychological

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<sup>176</sup> Bigger, "Victor Turner, Liminality, and Cultural Performance," 211.

<sup>177</sup> J. Lowell Lewis, "Toward a Unified Theory of Cultural Performance: A Reconstructive Introduction to Victor Turner," in Graham St. John (ed.) *Victor Turner and Contemporary Cultural Performance* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2008): 49.

<sup>178</sup> Bjørn Thomassen, *Liminality and the Modern: Living Through the In-Between* (New York, USA: Routledge, 2016): 1.

<sup>179</sup> "Liminality" is now applied to a multitude of phenomena. For example, it can be used spatial-temporally, ranging from describing spaces such as airports, in which time feels as if it "doesn't exist", to disputed territory and national borders. It has been applied to religious practice, and different stages of one's life, such as the period between completing the final university exams and graduating. It has also been applied to various minority groups, such as illegal immigrants and asylum seekers, people of mixed ethnicities, and intersex individuals.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>181</sup> I acknowledge that some LGBTQ+ individuals may also identify as heterosexual, however, in this instance, I am using "straight" to describe cisgender heterosexual (cis het) individuals.

<sup>182</sup> Andrew Gorman-Murray, "Liminal Subjects, Marginal Spaces and Material Legacies: Older Gay Men, Home and Belonging," in *Queer Presences and Absences*, (eds.) Yvette Taylor and Michelle Addison (England: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017): 102.

self will be remodelled.”<sup>183</sup> By conceptualising bisexuality as a liminal space, I offer a way of utilising bisexuality in theory that encompasses both bisexual subjectivity and bisexuality as an epistemological perspective. This ensures that bisexuality is not reduced to hypothetical inquiry, ignoring the lived reality of bisexual-identifying individuals.

### *Conclusion*

This section outlined the conceptual tools that inform my thesis. I agree with bisexuality scholars that the inclusion of bisexuality in queer theory would reveal the discipline’s continued reliance on the heterosexual/homosexual binary. I also agree that the addition of bisexuality would help queer theory transcend this dichotomisation. However, the primary method adopted by bisexuality scholars and queer theorists alike – bisexual epistemologies – has resulted in the lived reality of bisexual individuals being ignored once more, undermining the initial efforts of bisexuality scholars to have bisexuality recognised as a valid sexual orientation and lived reality. I hope to avoid this mistake of reducing bisexuality to a hypothetical inquiry by conceptualising bisexuality as a liminal space, simultaneously acknowledging bisexual existence and bisexuality’s deconstructive potential.

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<sup>183</sup> Mandy Wilson, “‘I Am the Prince of Pain, for I Am a Princess in the Brain’: Liminal Transgender Identities, Narratives and the Elimination of Ambiguities,” *Sexualities* 5, no. 4 (November 2002): 427.

## **Chapter 2: Methodology**

This chapter outlines my methodology. Given that bisexual theorising often overlooks bisexual identity/subjectivity, I chose to use interviewing as my primary research method. To do so ensured my analysis was grounded in the personal narratives of bisexuals, rather than using bisexuality as a topic of hypothetical inquiry. I analysed 9 interviews, involving 12 participants, conducted between February 2004 and March 2020 (Appendix 1). I begin this chapter by describing how I executed my research using a combination of interviews I was granted access to previously conducted by an organisation and interviews I conducted personally. I then highlight the limitations of my research, before outlining my positionality. I continue by considering my research within a Scottish context. I conclude by discussing how I analysed my interviews using a combined method of thematic analysis and discourse analysis.

### **2.1. The Interviews**

As required by the Gender Studies Masters, I undertook a ten-week internship. I interned as a researcher at OurStory Scotland (OSS) – a small Scottish charity that “collects, archives and presents the life stories and experiences” of Scotland’s LGBTQ+ community.<sup>184</sup> My primary role was summarising the oral history recordings of solo, paired and group interviews conducted by OSS in preparation for archiving at the National Library of Scotland.<sup>185</sup> I summarised 27 interviews in total. I conducted 2 interviews personally (1 solo and 1 paired) with the purpose of adding to OSS’s collection and providing primary research for my thesis. Both interviewees were brought to my attention by OSS; I contacted the participants through my OSS email.<sup>186</sup> I was given permission by OSS to use the interviews I had summarised for my thesis as the interviewees had already granted their permission for the interviews to be used for presentation and research purposes.

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<sup>184</sup> “Welcome to OurStory Scotland,” OurStory Scotland, accessed May 12, 2020, <https://www.ourstoryscotland.org.uk/>

<sup>185</sup> A summary of the recording is provided in addition to the audio file of the interview to offer a detailed overview of the recording. The interviews typically last between 1-3 hours; the interview summary breaks the interview down into approximately 5-minute segments, with 5-6 lines of text summarising each 5-minute segment. The summaries also provide additional information for the reader, such as the significance of individuals mentioned, key LGBTQ+ events, and relevant legislation.

<sup>186</sup> I contacted 2 other individuals who had expressed interest in being involved in my research. Unfortunately, the scheduled interviews had to be cancelled due to the outbreak of coronavirus and the imposition of lockdown in the United Kingdom in March 2020. I was in conversation with the potential interviewees in effort to find an alternative interviewing method, such as video call or written submission, but I did not receive a reply from either participant.

In order to qualify for my research, the individual had to either: a) identify as bisexual at the time of the interview; b) identify as bisexual previously, or c) have had sexual attraction/experiences with both same- and other-sexed individuals previously/presently or were open to the possibility of such attraction in the future, but did not identify as bisexual. My reasoning for this qualification was influenced by bisexuality scholars April Callis (2009) and Surya Monro et al. (2017) – mentioned in Chapter 1 – who use “bisexual” to describe (possibly unacted upon) sexual attraction to same- and other-sexed persons, and to refer to individuals who have these experiences. 9 of the 27 interviews qualified for my research, involving 12 participants. 2 participants, Sarah and Angela, appeared in 2 interviews each: both were in a group interview conducted by OSS (2004); OSS interviewed Sarah individually (2018), and; I interviewed Angela in a paired interview (2020).<sup>187</sup>

All participants identified as cisgender when interviewed, comprising of 6 women and 6 men. All individuals are White; 7 (1 woman and 6 men) are Scottish, 3 (women) are English but have lived in Scotland since their late teens/early 20s, 1 woman was raised in New Zealand but is of Scottish heritage and moved to Scotland as an adult, and 1 woman has Scottish parents but lived in London until her teens before moving to Scotland. I did not have access to the participants’ dates of birth, so I am unable to ascertain the exact ages, but the interviews indicate that the participants range between approximately mid-30s to late 60s. I was unable to determine the interviewees’ relationship statuses as OSS does not ask for this information; some participants provided this information voluntarily. I will address how this sample relates to Scotland demographically later in this chapter.

### *Semi-Structured Interviews*

OSS uses semi-structured interviews; I adopted the same method when conducting my interviews. Semi-structured interviews are the preferred method of feminist researchers as they encourage the active involvement of the interviewee when discussing their opinions.<sup>188</sup> Less restricting than structured interviews, semi-structured interviews enable the interviewer to explore the participant’s reality more freely.<sup>189</sup> They can also create a reciprocal relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee, enabling greater participant-involvement in the

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<sup>187</sup> See Appendix 1 for an overview of the interviewees.

<sup>188</sup> Shulamit Reinharz, “Feminist Interview Research,” in *Feminist Methods in Social Research* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992): 18.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid.

research process and collapsing the hierarchical relationship typically found in traditional interviewing.<sup>190</sup><sup>191</sup> Semi-structured interviewing allows the bisexual-identifying participants to give their account of their experiences; by using interviews, I ensured that bisexual subjectivity was foregrounded in my analysis and that bisexuality was not reduced to a hypothetical tool of analysis. OSS interviews typically begin with a prompt for the interviewee to describe their early life. The interviewee is asked additional questions throughout the interview, either to provide clarification or expansion on a certain topic, or to shift the focus of the interview. In both interviews I conducted I had prepared questions relating to my research concerning hostility from the straight and LGBTQ+ communities and how the gender of the interviewee's partner influenced their experiences as a bi+ individual. During both interviews, the participants provided this information without prompt. All interviews were conducted by me or Jaime Valentine, the Chair of OSS, and audio-recorded. I summarised each interview: they were not transcribed verbatim. I later transcribed verbatim portions of the interviews relevant to my research in preparation for my analysis.

## 2.2. Limitations

Interviewing is not a flawless research method. The oral history interviews by OSS were conducted with the participants' awareness that OSS seeks to amplify LGBTQ+ voices, while my interviewees knew my research concerned bisexuality. It is possible that my interviewees catered their answers to my research, although I was careful not to specify my focus on bisexual subjectivity. Any information provided by OSS's interviewees concerning bisexual subjectivity was volunteered without prompt. Nevertheless, there is a performative element to oral histories because they are narrative acts that require the presentation of self: interviewees

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<sup>190</sup> Reinharz, "Feminist Interview Research," 18; Wanda Pillow, "Confession, Catharsis, or Cure? Rethinking the Uses of Reflexivity as Methodological Power in Qualitative Research," *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 16, no. 2 (2003): 178.

<sup>191</sup> Feminist research originated in the desire to recognise the importance of the lived experiences of women. Feminist researchers argued that dominant avenues of knowledge production excluded women. For example, some feminist researchers have argued that traditional methods' reliance on positivism – which states certain knowledge (fact) is derived from sensory experience – excludes women because positivism assumes there is only one logic of science. Feminist researchers challenged traditional methods by creating new meanings by combining different opinions and standpoints that have usually been ignored within the Academy. They also recognised the hierarchies that exist in such practices, such as the tendency to generalise women's social situations or overlooking issues of race, class and culture, and how such practices can reinforce the status quo. Finally, feminist researchers argue that traditional research methods create a hierarchical subject/object relationship. See Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber, "Feminist Research: Exploring, Interrogating, and Transforming the Interconnections of Epistemology, Methodology, and Method," in *Handbook of Feminist Research: Theory and Praxis*, (ed). Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber (Thousand Oaks: SAGE, 2011): 2-9.



tell their life stories with the knowledge that their accounts will be listened to or read by another person.<sup>192</sup> Sociologist Sharlene Hesse-Biber argued that people identify themselves with or against other people; this is evident in the polarisation of traditional identity politics.<sup>193</sup> It is worth acknowledging that the interviewees – perhaps unconsciously – could recreate this homogenous heterosexual/queer polarisation. It should also be recognised that interviews explore an individual’s personal experiences and their version of the truth, rather than absolute fact.<sup>194</sup> The situated knowledge of the interviewee must be considered. Influential feminist theorist Donna Haraway defined “situated knowledge” as “embodied objectivity”, recognising how individuals are influenced by their own position within the world.<sup>195</sup> Ergo, how someone’s identity – comprised of various identity categories in addition to the (historic) time and space that they are in – affects their understanding of the world.<sup>196</sup> Feminist researchers argue that in order for research to be truly objective, the situated knowledge of the researcher must also be considered.<sup>197</sup> Consequently, central to feminist theory is the practice of reflexivity.<sup>198</sup>

### 2.3. Positionality

To quote anthropologist Charlotte Davies, “reflexivity, broadly defined, means a turning back on oneself.”<sup>199</sup> In other words, reflexivity requires the researcher to consider their relationship to their research and how this relationship is influenced by their positionality: the stance of the researcher in relation to the socio-political context of the study.<sup>200</sup> I am a Scottish bisexual woman in a long-term relationship with a heterosexual man. My interest in this topic is influenced by my own bisexuality, and the dislocation I often feel in both heteronormative and LGBTQ+ spaces. Being Scottish, I also wanted to focus on Scotland’s bisexual community – because both bisexuality and Scotland tend to be overlooked in research unless focusing on

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<sup>192</sup> Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber, “A Re-Invitation to Feminist Research.” in *Feminist Research Practice: A Primer*, 2nd edition (Thousand Oaks: SAGE, 2013): 53-4.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid.

<sup>194</sup> Hesse-Biber, “Feminist Research: Exploring, Interrogating and Transforming,” 9.

<sup>195</sup> Haraway argues that traditional scientific inquiry adopts the “God trick”: a “mode of seeing that pretends to offer a vision that is from everywhere and nowhere, equally and fully”. Haraway concludes that the only way of achieving any kind of objectivity in science is by admitting that knowledge is partial and situated. See: Donna Haraway, “Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privileges of Partial Perspective,” *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 3 (1988): 581.

<sup>196</sup> Nina Lykke, “Methodologies, Methods, and Ethics,” in *Feminist Studies: A Guide to Intersectional Theory, Methodology and Writing*, (ed.) Nina Lykke (London: Routledge, 2010): 152.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid., 159.

<sup>198</sup> Pillow, “Confession, Catharsis, or Cure?” 178.

<sup>199</sup> Charlotte Aull Davies, *Reflexive Ethnography: A Guide to Researching Selves and Others*, 2nd ed., (London: Routledge, 2008): 4.

<sup>200</sup> Pillow, “Confession, Catharsis, or Cure?” 178.

either topic specifically.<sup>201</sup> Reflexivity is sometimes dismissed as “narcissistic” based on the argument that acknowledging one’s positionality does not erase the consequences of such a position.<sup>202</sup> Nevertheless, by using reflexivity, I hope to “better represent, legitimise or call into question” my data.<sup>203</sup>

## 2.4. **Scottish Context**

To situate my research sample within a Scottish context, an overview of Scotland’s demographics and its LGBTQ+ history is useful. The latest national census (2011) found that 92% of the Scottish population (estimated at 5.5 million) identify as “White: Scottish” or “White: Other British”.<sup>204</sup><sup>205</sup> <sup>206</sup> The remaining 8% consists of White non-British individuals and Scottish minority ethnic groups.<sup>207</sup> If we are to assume that the sample reflects Scotland’s national demographics, 92% of 12 equates to just over 11. While the lack of non-White representation in the interview sample is significant given that it fails to acknowledge bisexuals of colour in Scotland, it is not proportionally inconsistent. Similarly, the 6 male and 6 female interviewees broadly reflect Scotland’s population regarding sex: the 2011 census was divided almost evenly between men (48%) and women (52%).<sup>208</sup> Unfortunately, this census did not request gender identity; it is therefore difficult to determine Scotland’s non-binary and trans population.<sup>209</sup> Other socio-political identities, such as class, age, and disability could also be

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<sup>201</sup> The United Kingdom is often reduced to England in media depictions and general discussion, marginalising Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland as a “Celtic Fringe” that surrounds a hegemonic England. See: Jessica Homberg-Schamm, *Colonised by Wankers: Postcolonialism and Contemporary Scottish Fiction* (Cologne: Modern Academic Publishing, 2018): 9.

<sup>202</sup> Pillow, “Confession, Catharsis, or Cure?” 176.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid.

<sup>204</sup> Population UK, “Scotland Population 2020,” accessed 29 July, 2020, <https://www.ukpopulation.org/scotland-population/>.

<sup>205</sup> Scots are sometimes described as having “Caledonian Antisyzygy”, which refers to the idea that Scottish people possess the dual identities of Scottish and British simultaneously. It was first coined by Scottish literary critic George Gregory Smith in reference to Scottish literature, but it since been used to describe the Scottish psyche. The Scottish and British identities are understood to be in direct opposition to each other and typical within Scots. The results of the 2014 Scottish Independence referendum is thought to reflect this: 44.7% voted for independence, while 55.3% voted to remain in the United Kingdom. See: Homberg-Schamm, *Colonised by Wankers*, 1-2.

<sup>206</sup> White non-British groups include ‘White: Irish’, ‘White: Polish’, ‘White: Gypsy/ Traveller’ and ‘White: Other white’. See Scotland’s Census, “Ethnicity Identity, Language and Religion” (2011), accessed 12 May 2020: <https://scotlandscensus.gov.uk/ethnicity-identity-language-and-religion>

<sup>207</sup> Ibid.

<sup>208</sup> Scotland’s Census, Table QS104SC: “Sex: All people,” *National Records of Scotland* (2011), accessed 20 July 2020: <https://www.scotlandscensus.gov.uk/ods-analyser/jsf/tableView/tableView.xhtml>.

<sup>209</sup> The 2021 Census will ask for gender identity. See: “Scotland’s Census 2021: Sex and Gender Identity Topic Report,” *National Records of Scotland*, accessed 20 July 2020: [https://www.scotlandscensus.gov.uk/documents/census2021/Sex\\_and\\_Gender\\_Identity\\_Topic\\_Report.pdf](https://www.scotlandscensus.gov.uk/documents/census2021/Sex_and_Gender_Identity_Topic_Report.pdf).

considered. I have chosen not to in this instance, largely due to space, but that does not mean that they are not important in influencing sexual identity.

Historically, Scotland has been the “passive or grudging recipient of Westminster liberalisation.”<sup>210</sup> The UK Parliament passed the Sexual Offences Act in 1967, legalising homosexual acts in private between two men aged 21 and over.<sup>211</sup><sup>212</sup> It took Scotland thirteen years to follow suit, passing the Criminal Justice (Scotland) Act in 1980.<sup>213</sup><sup>214</sup> Most works focusing on homosexuality within Britain fail to account for Scotland’s slower response.<sup>215</sup> Historians Jeffrey Meek and Steve Bruce argue religion played a part in Scotland’s reluctance, alongside the country’s rural landscape.<sup>216</sup> This was evident in 2000, when the “Keep the Clause” campaign – a privately funded political campaign seeking to stop the repeal of Section 2A of the Local Government Act – enjoyed some support in rural Scotland.<sup>217</sup> The campaign ultimately failed. Much like the United States, Scotland’s bisexual community developed in the early 1980s, again in reaction to antibisexual attitudes within mainstream gay liberation.<sup>218</sup> This was evidenced by 2 interviewees, Sarah and Kate, who established bisexual support groups in reaction to such hostility.

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<sup>210</sup> James Valentine, “Turning Out to Make History (Part 2),” *History Scotland* 12, no. 2 (2012): 50.

<sup>211</sup> The legislation was based on the recommendations of the Wolfenden Report. Officially entitled the “Report of the Departmental Committee on Homosexual Offences and Prostitution,” the report published the findings of a committee established in the United Kingdom following a string of convictions of well-known men for homosexual acts between males; proponents of decriminalisation had called for a commission to study the issue. See: David A.J. Richards, “The Fall of Empire,” in *The Rise of Gay Rights and the Fall of the British Empire*, (ed.) David A.J. Richards (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013): 158, and; Steven Dryden, “A short history of LGBT rights in the UK,” *British Library*, accessed 20 July 2020, <https://www.bl.uk/lgbtq-histories/articles/a-short-history-of-lgbt-rights-in-the-uk>

<sup>212</sup> Jeffrey MacGregor Meek, “Gay and bisexual men, self-perception and identity in Scotland, 1940 to 1980,” PhD thesis, University of Glasgow (2011): 10.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid.

<sup>214</sup> The Criminal Justice (Scotland) Act introduced the same measures introduced under the Sexual Offence Act 1967, which was limited to England and Wales.

<sup>215</sup> Meek, “Gay and bisexual men,” 11.

<sup>216</sup> Only 17% of Scotland’s population reside in rural areas, despite its accounting for 98% of Scotland’s land. The OSS interviews evidence how rural Scotland’s LGBTQ+ community is affected by growing up in these areas, as they had little to no contact with other individuals in the LGBTQ+ community. This results in domestic migration towards urban cities such as Glasgow and Edinburgh. In terms of religion, Scotland has traditionally been socially conservative, which is connected to Scotland’s rural communities as this tends to be where religion is concentrated. In 2011, 53.8% of Scots identified as Christian. Steve Bruce connects Scotland’s increasing liberalisation to the declining influence of the Church and urbanisation, while James Valentine connects it to devolution. See: Bruce, “Sex and Politics,” 217 and Valentine, “Turning Out to Make History (Part 2),” 50.

<sup>217</sup> Section 2A (known as Section 28 in England and Wales) stated that a local authority “shall not intentionally promote homosexuality or publish material with the intention of promoting homosexuality” or “promote the teaching in any maintained school of the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship.” The Act was repealed in 2000 in Scotland with a 99 to 17 majority vote. See: “Sex and Politics,” in Steve Bruce, *Scottish Gods: Religion in Modern Scotland 1900-2012* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014): 519.

<sup>218</sup> Voss et al., “Embracing the “And”,” 1609.

In 2015 and 2016, ILGA-Europe – an independent, international non-governmental umbrella organisation that advocates for human rights and equality for LGBTI people – ranked the UK as first and third respectively in terms of European countries’ legal and policy practices for LGBTI people.<sup>219</sup> Scotland met more criteria than England, Wales and Northern Ireland in both instances.<sup>220,221</sup> This is largely due to Scotland having devolved powers.<sup>222</sup> Additionally, the Scottish National Party (SNP) – Scotland’s largest political party and party of Government – has 9 LGBT politicians of 47 Members of Parliament (MPs) at Westminster.<sup>223</sup> This makes it the political party with proportionally the most LGBT politicians, and the SNP disproportionately contributes to Westminster’s title of “the gayest parliament in the world.”<sup>224</sup> Scotland is therefore widely considered to be a good place to live as an LGBTQ+ individual.<sup>225</sup>

## 2.5. Analysis

I used a combination of thematic analysis and discourse analysis to sort and analyse the interviews. Thematic analysis is a qualitative method for “identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data.”<sup>226</sup> Discourse analysis, while referring to a variety of different approaches to studying texts, generally shares “a rejection of the realist notion that language is simply a neutral means of reflecting or describing the world, and a conviction in the central importance of discourse in constructing social life.”<sup>227</sup> I used thematic analysis to first categorise the main themes that presented themselves within the interviews on the topic of

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<sup>219</sup> “Rainbow Europe,” ILGA-Europe, accessed 12 May, 2020, <https://www.ilga-europe.org/rainboweurope>

<sup>220</sup> Francesca Stella, Moya Flynn, and Anna Gawlewicz, “Unpacking the Meanings of a ‘Normal Life’ among Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Eastern European Migrants in Scotland,” *Central and Eastern European Migration Review* 7, no. 1 (2018): 59, <https://doi.org/10.17467/ceemr.2017.16>.

<sup>221</sup> Press Association, “Scotland tops league for gay rights,” *The Guardian*, 10 May 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/may/10/scotland-tops-league-for-gay-rights>

<sup>222</sup> The Scotland Act 1998 does not specify which matters are devolved to the Scottish Parliament; it specifies those matters that are reserved to the UK. See GOV.UK, “Devolution settlement: Scotland” for the full list, accessed 12 May, 2020: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/devolution-settlement-scotland>

<sup>223</sup> LGBT MP, accessed 20 June, 2020, <https://mps.whoare.lgbt/>

<sup>224</sup> Andrew Reynolds, “The UK’s parliament is still the gayest in the world after 2019 election,” *PinkNews*, 13 December, 2019, <https://www.pinknews.co.uk/2019/12/13/uk-gay-parliament-world-2019-general-election-snp-conservatives-labour-lgbt/>

<sup>225</sup> David Torrance, “The tartan rainbow: why it’s great to be gay in Scotland,” *The Guardian*, 5 April, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/apr/05/tartan-rainbow-why-great-to-be-gay-in-scotland-lgbt-rights-kezia-dugdale>

<sup>226</sup> Virginia Braun & Victoria Clarke, “Using thematic analysis in psychology,” *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3, no.2 (2006): 79.

<sup>227</sup> Rosalind Gill, “Discourse Analysis,” in *Qualitative Research with Text, Image and Sound: A Practical Handbook*, (eds.) Martin W. Bauer and George Gaskell, (London: SAGE, 2000): 172.

bisexuality. I then employed discourse analysis to interrogate these themes to explore the possibility of applying liminality to bisexuality.

## **Chapter 3: Discussion**

This chapter considers 3 main themes that emerged while analysing the 9 interviews. I will discuss each theme in turn, relating it to existing bisexuality scholarship. The first theme is (1) Biphobia/Bi-negativity, addressing the “pervasive stereotypes and negative attitudes” individuals experience because of their bisexuality.<sup>228</sup> This theme is divided into two subthemes as there is significant distinction between (a) Biphobia and (b) Bi-negativity. Additionally, I will consider how gender influences biphobia/bi-negativity, due to marked differences in the experiences of male and female interviewees. The second theme is (2) Need for Recognition, comprised of two subthemes: (a) Bi-Erasure and (b) Bi-Invisibility. This acknowledges the differences between the deliberate erasure of bisexuality in mainstream lesbian/gay activism and how bisexuality is invisibilised through un/misrecognition, situating bisexuality within the broader context of identity politics. The third theme is (3) Feeling Between Two Worlds, which concerns the dislocation bisexuals feel in both straight and LGBTQ+ spaces because of their sexuality. By grounding my research in personal accounts of bisexual subjectivity, I hope to avoid reducing bisexuality to a tool of hypothetical inquiry.

### **3.1. Biphobia and Bi-Negativity**

All (a) bisexual-identifying interviewees bar Graham reported experiencing biphobia or bi-negativity. Those who (b) did not identify as bisexual but had previously or (c) had/could experience same- and other-sex attraction also recalled experiences of sexuality-based discrimination. I describe this as homophobia: ranging negative attitudes toward homosexuality or people who are/perceived as being LGBTQ+.<sup>229</sup> I largely focus on the bisexual-identifying interviewees as their experiences mostly concerned their bisexuality.

All bisexual-identifying participants reported experiencing biphobia and bi-negativity from the straight and queer communities. Using bisexuality scholar Mickey Eliason’s argument, I use “biphobia” and “bi-negativity” to describe different phenomena. Eliason prefers “homonegativity”/“bi-negativity” to “homophobia”/“biphobia” for various reasons.<sup>230</sup> Firstly, Eliason

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<sup>228</sup> Kwok et al., “Bisexual-Identifying Women’s Relationship Expectations,” 3.

<sup>229</sup> Kerri Durnell Schuiling and Frances E. Likis, *Women's Gynecologic Health* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Burlington, MA: Jones and Bartlett Publishers, 2013): 186.

<sup>230</sup> Mickey Eliason, “Bi-Negativity,” *Journal of Bisexuality* 1 (2000): 140.

argues “homophobia” and “biphobia” are limiting because they draw attention to prejudices held by one individual, rather than “societal institutions that create the climate for negative attitudes to flourish.”<sup>231</sup> She disagrees with the utilisation of “phobia” in this instance because it does not describe “irrational, uncontrollable fear that leads to psychological distress” but an “often rational and intentional” position “fuelled by anger, hostility or hatred.”<sup>232</sup> Eliason argues that individuals with genuine phobias typically want to overcome their fears, while homophobes usually do not.<sup>233</sup> “Bi-negativity” acknowledges the nuanced societal nature of antibisexual discourse, while “biphobia” reduces such attitudes to irrational fear.<sup>234</sup> I propose that “biphobia” should not be dismissed terminologically; rather, “biphobia” can describe anti-bisexuality attitudes within the straight community, as the interviewees tended to associate heterosexual anti-bisexuality attitudes with ignorance. “Biphobia” aptly describes the “irrational, uncontrollable fear” of bisexuality within the straight community. “Bi-negativity” better describes queer anti-bisexuality attitudes, as the queer community, particularly lesbians/gays, have sustained a “societal institution that creates the climate for negative attitudes to flourish” based on attitudes “fuelled by anger, hostility or hatred”, evidenced in Chapter 1. The interviewees expressed feeling betrayed and frustrated by the queer community because they believed the community understood the reality of bisexuality but deliberately chose to ignore it. That said, I do believe that biphobia is also present within the queer community, demonstrated by the salience of anti-bisexuality stereotypes.

### 3.1.(a) *Biphobia*

Interviewees provided various examples of biphobia from heterosexual individuals. Sarah, Angela and JohnA recalled being asked what their “percentage” was i.e. how their attraction to men and women was “divided”:

*“It’s another thing that people outside of the bi community seem to get obsessed with. It’s one of the first questions I often get asked: “So, what’s your percentage?”*

(Sarah)

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<sup>231</sup> Ibid.

<sup>232</sup> Ibid.

<sup>233</sup> Ibid.

<sup>234</sup> Klesse, “Shady Characters, Untrustworthy Partners, and Promiscuous Sluts,” 234.

This is a common stereotype about bisexuality grounded in the misconception that bisexuality is a combination of heterosexuality and homosexuality.<sup>235</sup> The interviewees believed this question stemmed from misinformation and ignorance regarding bisexuality rather than homophobia:

*“From the straight side, unless you’re talking about real homophobic people... there’s no such biphobia issue... they’re slightly, “I don’t know how to deal with this”... Or they’re curious and they decide they might as well just see how far they can go... My experience is the same type of men who will be homophobic will be biphobic but only on the homophobic side.”* (JohnA)

Participants recalled other examples aligning with common stereotypes provided in Chapter 1, such as bisexual promiscuity.<sup>236</sup> The hyper-sexualisation of bisexuality was discussed in-depth among the support group. Both JohnA and Sarah expressed frustration at the fact that there was no other label for bisexuals, while labels such as “gay” and “lesbian” were commonly used alternatives by homosexuals:

*“...there isn’t really a non-sexual word for it... It’s “bi” and silently “sexual””*  
(JohnA)

JohnA and Sarah felt that the lack of a non-sexual label for bisexuality added to its hyper-sexualisation. Other participants linked hyper-sexualisation to media representations of bisexuality:

*“There’s often the media representation of bisexuality [as] something that happens when you’re in bed with people of opposite genders and at no other time. That is when you are bisexual: in the process of having sex with two other people.”*  
(David)

David’s description of bisexual representation demonstrates how bisexuality continues to be positioned within the gender and sexuality binaries, as representations of bisexuality posit

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<sup>235</sup> Pennington, “Bisexuals “Doing Gender” in Romantic Relationships,” 65.

<sup>236</sup> Erickson-Schroth and Mitchell, “Queering Queer Theory,” 298.



bisexuals as people who simultaneously engage in heterosexual *and* homosexual sex, failing to acknowledge those who do not conform to the gender binary. Various scholars have explored the impact of such media depictions. Pennasilico and Amodeo (2019) associate hyper-sexualisation of female bisexuality with media representations, concluding that while representation is hypothetically beneficial, depictions have been mostly harmful as “they are often riddled with stereotypes...”<sup>237</sup> Media theorist Sarah Corey’s study of televised representations of bisexual women supports this, finding that female bisexual characters were typically involved in cheating scandals and love triangles.<sup>238</sup> The hyper-sexualisation of bisexual women was evident in the interviews: Angela recounted being asked for threesomes in both interviews, and both Sarah and Angela recalled being called “greedy”. Significantly, none of the male participants recounted similar experiences – although this could be because male bisexuality is rarely represented on screen.<sup>239</sup> The hyper-sexualisation of male bisexuality is typically articulated instead through the false association of bisexual men with the spread of HIV/AIDS.<sup>240</sup><sup>241</sup> This was evidenced by the BiScotland group: a member was accused of genocide for having sexual relations with a bisexual man. Both examples demonstrate the gendered nature of biphobia/bi-negativity.

The hyper-sexualisation of bisexuals was also evidenced by various participants reporting that partners had questioned their faithfulness. This is due to the stereotype that bisexuals prefer non-monogamous relationships (only 1 participant was in a polyamorous relationship at the time of interviewing). Stuart, who identifies as gay but has had romantic/sexual relationships with women, recalled his girlfriend’s concerns:

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<sup>237</sup> Pennasilico and Amodeo, “The Invisi\_les,” 24.

<sup>238</sup> Corey examined media texts with female characters that had prolonged romantic/sexual relationships with more than one sex or gender, noting the “significantly higher” representation of sexual minorities from the 1990s onwards compared to the 1970s and 1980s. Corey did so with the goal of identifying concurrent themes regarding television’s depiction of bisexuality. Corey studied three shows, *Grey’s Anatomy*, *Lost Girl*, and *Orange is the New Black*. She identified three themes: 1) lack of terminology/self-identification; 2) greedy/unable to commit, and; 3) parental displeasure. Corey’s findings reflect common tropes about bisexuality in sexuality scholarship. See: Corey, “All Bi Myself,” 190-1; 194-200.

<sup>239</sup> Meyer argues that media representations of bisexuality “follow a typical narrative pattern”: bisexual characters are usually female and non-White. See: Meyer, “Representing Bisexuality on Television,” 366-7.

<sup>240</sup> Callis, “Black Sheep of the Pink Flock,” 84; Klesse, “Shady Characters, Untrustworthy Partners, and Promiscuous Sluts,” 232.

<sup>241</sup> Erickson-Schroth and Mitchell argue that bisexual men were the easiest to blame for the spread of HIV/AIDS into the heterosexual population – because it was thought that bisexual men contracted the disease from gay men and that they then passed it on to heterosexual women. Ulrich Gooß stressed that it has since been proven that there is “little substance to this argument.” See: Erickson-Schroth and Mitchell, “Queering Queer Theory,” 301; Gooß, “Concepts of Bisexuality,” 12.

*“...if I’m chatting to anyone else, male or female, she’s thinking in her head, “Is that a challenge?””*

Stuart’s plurisexual attraction caused his partner to think he was more likely to cheat.

A few interviewees discussed how these representations affected their understanding of bisexuality, recounting concerns that they would become attracted to someone else of a gender different to that of their partner. Such anxieties were enhanced by stereotypes about percentages of attraction. The interviewees therefore demonstrated internalised biphobia/bi-negativity: the “unintentional agreement with negative and biased understandings around bisexuality, as well as the subsequent development of negative beliefs and feelings about one’s bisexual orientation.”<sup>242</sup>

### 3.1.(b) *Bi-Negativity*

Both Roberts et al. and McLean associate internalised biphobia/bi-negativity with the exclusion of bisexuals from the lesbian/gay community, which I discussed at length in Chapter 1: bisexuality weakened their ethnic-model of sexuality.<sup>243</sup> One of the main methods adopted by lesbian/gay activists to justify bi-erasure was questioning the authenticity of bisexuality, typically by rejecting bisexuality as an authentic orientation or by painting those who do not identify as monosexual as going through a confused “phase”.<sup>244</sup> Both tactics were evident in the interviews.

Sarah believed that the idea that bisexuality does not exist – which can be seen in both straight and queer communities – directly stems from mainstream gay/lesbian activism:

*“...they’ve completely bought the myth that the gay movement has promulgate that there’s no bisexuals...”*

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<sup>242</sup> Monro et al., “Is Bisexuality Invisible?” 673.

<sup>243</sup> Roberts et al. “Between a Gay and a Straight Place,” 556-7; McLean, “Inside, Outside, Nowhere,” 72.

<sup>244</sup> Israel and Mohr, “Attitudes Towards Bisexual Women and Men,” 121; Roberts et al., “Between a Gay and a Straight Place,” 554.

She supported this by recounting an experience of her bisexuality being invalidated by a lesbian women's collective. When asked to divide themselves between heterosexuals and lesbians, Sarah asked where she should stand and was told there was "no such thing" as bisexuality. This highlights the longevity of anti-bisexual attitudes within radical/lesbian feminist circles discussed previously.<sup>245</sup> JohnA discussed anti-bisexual attitudes among gay men:

*"If you're on the scene or you have a boyfriend, it's absolutely not done to say that you're bisexual."*

JohnA's account indicates bi-negativity exists in gay men's circles. Kate supports this, recounting her time as a volunteer with Switchboard (the second oldest LGBT+ telephone helpline in the United Kingdom), causally linking it her reasoning behind establishing a separate bisexual phonenumber in Edinburgh during the 1980s. Kate said:

*"Switchboard at that time had very much the sense that bisexual people were a) all men; b) all married men; and c) all married men who were actually gay. So that was their image of bisexuals."*

Kate's comment demonstrates how Switchboard invalidated bisexual men – but also how they invalidated bisexual women by refusing to acknowledge women at all. JohnB disagrees with this, expressing amazement at how little bigotry towards bisexuals exists among male homosexuals. These contradicting ideas are reflected in scholarship concerning male bisexuality, with some research indicating gay men are more tolerant than lesbians toward bisexuals (Schokeid, 2001) while others suggest gay men do not accept male bisexuality (Mohr and Rochlen, 1999).<sup>246</sup>

Various interviewees suggested bisexuality is rejected as a valid identity because it cannot be categorised as heterosexual or homosexual. JohnA's mother told him to "choose one way or the other", and Kate, who began dating a man while a member of her university's Gay Society, was assumed to have gone:

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<sup>245</sup> Galupo et al., "Conceptualisation of Sexual Orientation Among Sexual Minorities," 451.

<sup>246</sup> McLean, "Inside, Outside, Nowhere," 67.

*“from being a lesbian to being straight – not, you know, not stopping to “touch go” or anything...”*

Some interviewees related this to the centrality of gender in sexual object choice in determining sexuality, which is fundamental to the traditional ethnic-model of sexuality adopted by mainstream lesbian/gay activists:

*“By focusing on the end point, it completely negates anything that’s come before the fifty years’ worth of a phase. If you end up with one at the end of it, that’s it: you’ve come to your true sexuality – when your true sexuality has been true at whatever point.”* (JohnA)

Louise, who is in a long-term relationship, demonstrated such thinking:

*“I think now I would identify myself because I’ve been with Zoë for so long. So, I would think of myself as being lesbian...”*

Louise identifies as lesbian because of her relationship with a woman but acknowledges that she previously “didn’t really feel that [she] had to be pinned down” by labelling her sexuality. Louise’s choice to identify as lesbian reinforces JohnA’s statement.

Another popular tactic to discredit bisexuality is by conceptualising it as a “phase” people go through before realising their true heterosexuality/homosexuality.<sup>247</sup> Monosexism has resulted in the depiction of bisexuality as a “stepping-stone” for people to realise their authentic sexuality.<sup>248</sup> Cordelia supported this, saying she “went through a bisexual phase for about six months...” before determining she was lesbian. This common stereotype is furthered by people coming out as bisexual first before identifying as something else, like Lisa. Numerous justifications for doing so have been offered, such as individuals being scared to come out as lesbian/gay, or because lesbian/gay individuals want to experience “heterosexual privilege”.<sup>249</sup> Relatedly, those who identify as neither heterosexual/homosexual are seen as “confused”.<sup>250</sup>

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<sup>247</sup> Roberts et al., “Between a Gay and a Straight Place,” 554.

<sup>248</sup> McLean, “Inside, Outside, Nowhere,” 69.

<sup>249</sup> Roberts et al., “Between a Gay and a Straight Place,” 554; Callis, “Black Sheep of the Pink Flock,” 90.

<sup>250</sup> Ibid.

Bisexual-identifying interviewees recalled such accusations, demonstrated by Sarah's incident at that workshop. Angela was told numerous times that she was "actually lesbian". The examples provided by Angela and Sarah can also be linked to the consequences of "performative bisexuality" among women, discussed in Chapter 1: because some heterosexual women "perform bisexually", typically to please heterosexual men, bisexual women have been illegitimated.

Interviewees demonstrated how they internalised this inauthenticity. JohnA attempted to "choose" between homosexuality and heterosexuality before concluding that he could not, while others expressed concerns that their bisexuality was a phase that would result in them hurting their partner, including JohnB:

*"...I remember feeling a terrible kind of unease – panic even – what would I do if I was with a guy and then I suddenly – something about my sexual desire oscillated away from guys towards women and suddenly I didn't find him attractive anymore."*

The common thread throughout the bisexual-identifying participants' accounts of their experiences of biphobia/bi-negativity is the frustration that they feel at their sexuality continuously being overlooked. This informs the second theme, Need for Recognition, which relates to broader discussions regarding identity politics and performativity – both discussed in Chapter 1.

### **3.2. Need for Recognition**

All interviewees, including non-bisexuals, stressed the importance of having their sexuality recognised; the bisexual interviewees particularly desired recognition from the queer community and were frustrated by bi-negativity within LGBTQ+ circles. I will refer to this deliberate overlooking of bisexuality as "bi-erasure", grounding my discussion within the wider debate about identity politics. Numerous interviewees also drew attention to bisexuality's invisibility i.e. the struggle to recognise other bisexuals, either due to a lack of social signifiers, or because the gender of a bisexual individual's partner leads to the assumption that the bisexual person is heterosexual/homosexual. I refer to this as "bi-

invisibility”. These categories overlap, as it is a circular phenomenon: bisexuals are less involved in mainstream queer politics/institutions because it is likely they will be excluded, resulting in a lack of bisexual representation. Bisexual voices are then missing, leading to misrepresentation and erasure.<sup>251</sup>

### 3.2.(a) *Bi-Erasure:*

Self-identifying bisexuals expressed clear frustration at being excluded – and consequently erased – from mainstream lesbian/gay politics, providing numerous examples of such exclusion. Kate and Sarah, whose experiences happened separately, fought to have “Bisexual” added to the “Lesbian and Gay Centre” in London and Glasgow respectively, facing strong resistance. Stacey Young provides various instances of such events, arguing that “bisexuality” was excluded from conference titles and community centres because the categories of “lesbian” and “gay” were destabilised “once you throw bisexuality in.”<sup>252</sup> Other examples of bi-erasure provided included bisexuality being ignored as a sexual orientation at conferences and workshops – as evidenced by Sarah in the previous section – and incidents of tokenism, in which participants were often the only bisexual present at events, and faced ridicule because of their bisexuality. Each example provides a visceral depiction of the larger debate, outlined in Chapter 1, concerning sexual identity politics: the inclusion of non-monosexual sexual minorities weakens the identity-based politics of mainstream gay liberation.<sup>253</sup> However, the interviews also demonstrated the consequences of identity politics on other non-homosexual individuals. Lisa, who identifies as demisexual, was notably upset when she discussed her realisation that she no longer identified as a gay woman – which she had identified as since her 20s:

*“...it made me feel not authentic – for the first time in a long time... I felt like I was doing people a bit of a disservice.”*

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<sup>251</sup> Young, “Dichotomies and Displacement,” 53.

<sup>252</sup> Young discusses the “instability” of bisexuality as length, arguing that heterosexuality and homosexuality are seen as “stable” because they are associated with fixed sexual object choice. She argues that this stability is in fact a fiction and sees the supposed “instability” of bisexuality as a potential source destabilise sexuality and gender binaries. See: Young, “Dichotomies and Displacement,” 60-5.

<sup>253</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

Lisa illustrates how the bipolar model of sexual identity politics can marginalise other sexual minorities by policing categories of sexual orientation.

Chapter 1 discussed the paradoxical nature of bisexual politics, which simultaneously relies on sexual identity politics for recognition while bisexuality's fluidity highlights the limits of such strict categorisations.<sup>254</sup> The bisexual-identifying interviewees recognised this contradiction: they generally agreed that while abandoning sexual identity categories completely was the most desirable, their bisexual identity was incredibly important to them. The importance the interviewees felt in labelling themselves as bisexual partly stemmed from the exclusion and hostility that they faced from members of the queer community because of their bisexuality, galvanising some interviewees to continue using the label in effort to gain recognition. Kate said that she always made the effort to use "bisexual" because "the word doesn't get used or seen" otherwise, while JohnB stated that even though most bisexuals are "functionally pansexual", he identifies as bisexual because:

*"[bisexual] is a badge of shame. The hatred and the invective that they heaped upon us because of that means that it is a flag that I will always stand by. It's a bloody banner."*

Other participants, such as Sarah, identify as bisexual because doing so acknowledges their "whole history." Sarah admitted that she thought it was unlikely she would date a man again but identified as bisexual to recognise her past relationships with men. Unlike Louise, discussed earlier, Sarah's sexuality is not defined by her sexual object choice. Similarly, JohnA stated that he identifies as bisexual because:

*"...if I'm with a man and I identify as bisexual, if I fancy a woman, that's fine... you're allowed to do that."*

JohnA appeared to find comfort in the freedom of identifying as bisexual. Nevertheless, some of the interviewees identify as bisexual simply because that is what they feel best fits them: Angela said that she did not "like the other terms because [they do not] mean anything to [her]."

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<sup>254</sup> McLaren, *Feminism, Foucault and Embodied Subjectivity*, 135.

Finally, some of the bisexual-identifying interviewees, including Sarah and JohnB, recognised the problematic implication of “bi-sexuality”, acknowledging that the label appears to support the gender binary. However, they continued to identify as bisexual to highlight the inclusivity of bisexuality, and because other plurisexual labels such as “pansexual” are not as well-known:

*“...because it’s the word that means the most to the most people and we need to reclaim that space – even if the word for it isn’t that good.” (Sarah)*

### 3.2.(b) *Bi-Invisibility*

Another way Need for Recognition was expressed was through the interviewees’ frustration at being unable to identify other bisexuals, leading JohnB to conclude that bisexuals are “like the invisible men.” This relates to bi-invisibility. The previous section demonstrates how bierasure contributes to bi-invisibility, delegitimising bisexuality as a sexual orientation. However, bisexuality’s inconspicuousness also stems from difficulty to recognise bisexuality. The interviewees attributed this invisibility to two main factors: the lack of non-stereotypical social signifiers to illustrate one’s bisexuality, and the gender of a bisexual individual’s partner. Both factors stem from the salience of monosexism in Western culture.

The previous section outlined the various stereotypes that the participants were subjected to. A consequence of this is that bisexual-identifying individuals can struggle to signify their bisexuality to others without relying on these stereotypes. This is evident in both the bisexuality scholarship discussed in Chapter 1 and in the interviews. For example, both Angela and JohnB suggested that their bisexuality is often unrecognised because they do not conform to stereotypical presentations of bisexuality. Similarly, JohnA said:

*“Sometimes I assume that things must scream out to people and, apparently, they don’t. Or people go out of their way... not to read the signs.”*

JohnA is not only suggesting that his bisexuality is often unrecognised because he does not conform to typical stereotypical ideals of bisexuality, but also that some people deliberately ignore his bisexuality. This supports the previous argument that bisexuality is purposefully erased as a sexual orientation – probably in effort to sustain the monosexual paradigm.



Bisexuality scholar Terry Evans supports this argument, positing that the dominance of heterosexual and homosexual cultures has resulted in the lack of a strong bisexual culture.<sup>255</sup> Sarah echoed this position:

*“...there isn’t like an accepted sexual orientation called bisexual in the culture...”*

Because bisexuality is not accepted – or less accepted – as a sexual orientation within Western monosexist society, bisexuals struggle to signal their bisexuality to others without relying on harmful stereotypes.

The interviewees also voiced the opinion that their bisexuality is ignored or unrecognised because of the gender of their romantic/sexual partner, which I have experienced personally. Due to the salience of monosexism in Western society, the interviewees are often misidentified as heterosexual or homosexual. Participants provided both examples:

*“I was in a relationship with a woman; we were both bi. But then it would be assumed that we were gay.”* (Angela)

And:

*“It was hard when I was in a relationship with him to be out [as bisexual] to people...”* (Kate)

Kate furthered her statement with:

*“it’s actually quite hard as a bisexual person to be out in general because you have to kind of either label yourself or describe your sexual history rather than just saying, you know, “Meet so-and-so, she’s my girlfriend,” kind of thing.”*

Kate’s comment illustrates the difficulty bisexuals have in “proving” their bisexuality: when in a romantic relationship, their bisexuality is misrecognised as heterosexual/homosexual; when single, they also struggle to “prove” their sexuality without providing examples that

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<sup>255</sup> Evans, “Bisexuality,” 93.

demonstrate their attraction to more than one gender. Angela supported this, succinctly summarising that she “couldn’t win” no matter which gender she dated. This supports bisexual feminist theorist Carolyn Pajor, who argued bisexuals appear to be “a group whom it’s socially acceptable not to accept.”<sup>256</sup>

Again, the interviewees illustrated how they internalised these attitudes. For example, Jeri and Sarah expressed guilt for experiencing heterosexual privilege. Jeri confessed that he did not often consider consequences of heteronormativity – using the specific example of potentially living in a care home in the future – because he was in a long-term relationship with a woman. He felt bad for not having considered this until it was brought up in the interview. Sarah said:

*“...you feel – the heterosexual privilege just dumped upon you as soon as you’re in a relationship with someone of the opposite gender...”*

Relatedly, multiple participants discussed “passing”, in which a bisexual person “[assumes] (either actively or passively) membership with multiple communities.”<sup>257</sup> For the most part, interviewees demonstrated “passive” passing, evidenced by the examples of their bisexuality being misidentified. However, JohnA confessed that when he was with gay men, it was easier “just not to mention any of the woman side.” Sarah also demonstrated “active” passing: she would gel her hair when she wanted to “[look] more heterosexual.” Sarah highlights the relationship between gender norms and sexuality: heterosexual women are assumed to put more effort into their appearance than lesbians. Her comment also supports Pennington’s argument – outlined in Chapter 1 – that bisexuals can “negotiate an alteration of traditional performances of gender and sexuality...”<sup>258</sup> Sarah, by complying or subverting gender norms, deliberately alters her appearance to imply specific sexuality.

Before moving on to the final theme, I will address the single interviewee who did not relate to the others participants’ experiences. Graham identifies as a bisexual man and is married to a gay trans man. Graham’s husband identified as a heterosexual cis woman when they married. It can be assumed, based on the accounts of the other interviewees and the evident salience of monosexuality, that Graham’s sexuality has been misunderstood as both heterosexual and

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<sup>256</sup> Carolyn Pajor, “White Trash: Manifesting the Bisexual.” *Feminist Studies* 31:3 (2005): 574.

<sup>257</sup> Lingel, “Adjusting the Borders,” 382.

<sup>258</sup> Pennington, “Bisexuals Doing Gender,” 33-43; 48.

homosexual. When I asked Graham if he had ever experienced any kind of discrimination because of his bisexuality, he said he had not. Significantly, Graham mentioned in his interview that he was not heavily involved in the LGBTQ+ scene – the only participant that was not – when he first came out or now. This suggests a direct correlation between anti-bisexual attitudes and the lesbian/gay community, supporting my earlier discussion. Additionally, given that Graham’s husband only recently started to identify as trans, it can be assumed that, for the most part, Graham has been misidentified as heterosexual – benefiting from heterosexual privilege by “passing” as straight.

### **3.3. Feeling Between Two Worlds**

An underlying theme throughout the interviews was the binary conceptualisation of two worlds: straight and queer. I use “straight world” to describe both heterosexuality and heteronormativity: “the privileging of heterosexuality as normal, natural, and right over homosexuality” in daily life and societal institutions.<sup>259</sup> I rely on David Halperin’s definition of “queer”, which “acquires its meaning from its oppositional relationship to the norm.”<sup>260</sup> It parallels Michael Warner’s “queer planet”, which “[confronts] the default heteronormativity of modern culture.”<sup>261</sup> I have chosen “queer” rather than “lesbian/gay” to acknowledge how this umbrella term has resulted in the marginalisation of bisexuality by relying on the dichotomisation of “queer” and “heterosexual”, creating another space in which bisexuality does not fit.<sup>262</sup> The interviewees did not necessarily express this binary division explicitly; rather, it was veiled in discussions of feeling that bisexuals were perceived as a combination of heterosexual and homosexual, that the interviewees moved between the straight/queer worlds, and a sense that bisexuals do not fit in anywhere.

#### **3.3.(a) Heterosexuality/Homosexuality**

April Callis argues that queer theory ignores bisexuality because it is misunderstood as a combination of heterosexuality and homosexuality, thus existing within the sexuality binary.<sup>263</sup>

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<sup>259</sup> James Joseph Dean, *Straights: Heterosexuality in Post-Closeted Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 26.

<sup>260</sup> David Halperin, *St. Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1995): 62.

<sup>261</sup> Michael Warner, “Fear of a Queer Planet,” *Social Text* 29 (1991): 16.

<sup>262</sup> Cohen, “Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens,” 437.

<sup>263</sup> Callis, 216.

This conceptualisation of bisexuality has existed from the start of sexuality scholarship, evidenced by The Kinsey Scale describing all those who ranked (1) to (5) on the polarised heterosexual/homosexual spectrum of sexuality as “bisexual”. Examples provided throughout this discussion illustrate this misconception, including David’s comment regarding media representations of bisexuality and the notion of percentages of attraction. The interviewees also demonstrated how bisexuals sometimes internalise this notion of a combination, noting that some people describe themselves as “straight and gay” rather than “bisexual”:

*“they tend to think of it as their gay side. So, there’s gay and straight and they’re the same person...”* (JohnB)

JohnB suggested that, in the case of bisexual men, this is a tactic of self-preservation against bi-negativity – or because bisexuality is commonly misunderstood. JohnA also linked the combination myth to common misconceptions about bisexuality and the lack of a bisexual community:

*“A lot of people have just not come across the concept of bisexuality in an organised sense or as a widespread identity. So, they will say what they want – what they can say to express their position as best they can.”*

The perpetuation of the misconception that bisexuality is a combination of heterosexuality and homosexuality denies bisexuality the authentication of a valid sexual identity, contributing to bi-erasure. The combination myth also positions bisexuality within the sexuality binary, thus justifying queer theory’s overlooking of bisexuality.

### 3.3.(b) *Moving Between Straight/Queer Worlds*

Bisexuals are commonly stereotyped as “fence-sitters”, typically by the lesbian/gay community.<sup>264</sup> Bisexuals are dismissed because they – in a society that determines sexuality by a singularly (binary) gendered object choice – “choose not to choose.”<sup>265</sup> Like the misconception of bisexuality as a combination of heterosexuality and homosexuality, the attribution of “fence-sitting” to bisexuality demonstrates the binary division of heterosexuality

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<sup>264</sup> Erickson-Schroth and Mitchell, “Queering Queer Theory,” 301.

<sup>265</sup> Whitney, “Cyborgs Among Us,” 119; Pramaggiore, “BI-Introduction I: Epistemologies of the Fence,” 3.

and homosexuality, again revealing the salience of monosexism in Western culture. To quote Maria Pramaggiore, the fence “identifies a place of in-betweenness and indecision.”<sup>266</sup> The notion of indecision can be linked to previous discussions of bisexuality being a confused “phase”. Stuart demonstrated this binary division of same- and other-gendered attraction:

*“I let it out the box, y’know, when I met up with someone, but then it was back in the box again and I was back to straight Stuart who was academic and just didn’t have a girlfriend.”*

“It” describes Stuart’s same-gender attraction; he does not dismiss this attraction but separates it from his other-gender attraction. He discussed his sexuality like they were different masks that he put on. Sarah reflected a similar dichotomisation, noting that her romantic feelings for men and women were completely different. After coming out, Stuart entered into a relationship with a woman, who he now has a child with. He said:

*“Suddenly, after being out for a while, moving into this world of, “Now I’m going to fit into this straight world” ...pushing a buggy with 2.1 children and the rest of it.”*

Stuart’s description of his plurisexuality highlights how bisexuals do not only navigate between polarised heterosexuality and homosexuality, but also the social norms and the wider “world” attributed to each sexuality. Stuart’s conceptualisation of the “straight world” did not only refer to his being in an “opposite”-sex relationship, but to the heteronormative mould that he and his partner were then fitting. Sarah again echoed this sentiment, describing heterosexuality and homosexuality as different “camps”.

### 3.3.(c) *“Where do I fit?”*

Both the notion that bisexuality is a combination of heterosexuality and homosexuality, and the different “worlds” relating to this led some of the participants to voice that they felt like they did not belong in either the straight or queer world. Sarah said:

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<sup>266</sup> Pramaggiore, “BI-Introduction I: Epistemologies of the Fence,” 3.

*“You’re not confused because you’re bisexual. You’re confused because you’re thinking, “Where do I fit?””*

This was evidenced by JohnA:

*“It took a long time to work out – where [his bisexuality] fitted in. And in fact, it took until late teens to realise I didn’t really fit in at all.”*

The interviewees attributed this again to monosexism, arguing that bisexuals felt dislocated because bisexuality is not culturally accepted as a sexual orientation. They argued people do not “like the messiness” (JohnA) of bisexuality because it “[blurs] the boundaries” (Sarah). This idea of not fitting in demonstrates the consequences of sustained bi-erasure and biphobia/bi-negativity. The interviewees describe their bisexuality like it is a liminal space: they are “neither here nor there” but “on the fence” between heterosexuality/heteronormativity and queer(ness).<sup>267</sup> To quote Pramaggiore, the bisexual-identifying participants are “precariously perched atop a structure that divides and demarcates,” in which the structure is monosexism.<sup>268</sup>

### Conclusion

This chapter considered the key findings from the interviews: Biphobia/Bi-Negativity; Need for Recognition, and; Feeling Between Two Worlds. Each theme supports existing bisexuality theory and demonstrates the co-dependent relationship between the lived reality of sexual minorities and sexuality scholarship; particularly, how sexuality scholarship mirrors existing anti-bisexual attitudes in real life. The through-line of the interviews was the continued positioning of bisexuality between heterosexuality and homosexuality (or queer), whether that be the continued misconception that bisexuality is a combination of heterosexuality and homosexuality, or evident in the uncertainty the participants experience at not quite fitting in in either the “straight world” or the “queer world”. Additionally, an undercurrent throughout the interviews was the deconstructive nature of bisexuality, demonstrated in the bisexual-identifying interviewees refusal to conform to the monosexist paradigm and their ability to

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<sup>267</sup> Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 359.

<sup>268</sup> Pramaggiore, “BI-Introduction I,” 3.

subvert gender norms. Each of these findings inform my proposal of understanding bisexuality as a liminal space.

## **Chapter 4: Bisexuality as a Liminal Space**

In their essay, “Embracing the “And””: Between Queer and Bisexual Theory at Brighton BiFest” (2014), scholars Georgina Voss, Kath Browne and Camel Gupta argued that bisexual identity is often invisibilised in queer theorising and sexuality scholarship.<sup>269</sup> They asserted that the use of bisexuality as an epistemological perspective that deconstructs sexuality and gendered binaries has resulted in the overlooking of bisexuality as an identity and subject position, meaning that “the possibility of simultaneously inhabiting these positions... has been undertheorised.”<sup>270</sup> Their article attempts to explore the ways in which bisexuality can be used for queer deconstruction while also recognising the “stable coherent bi identity.”<sup>271</sup> I propose that understanding bisexuality as a liminal space offers this opportunity, as liminality can simultaneously encompass bisexual identity and subjectivity – acknowledging bisexual existence – at a discursive level while also offering a conceptual lens through which to approach bisexuality that allows queer deconstruction of sexuality and gendered binaries. I begin this chapter with a brief disclaimer regarding my application of liminality to bisexuality as there is some overlap in common terminology that may cause confusion. I then present my two-fold approach to understanding bisexuality as a liminal space. First, I illustrate how “liminal space” aptly describes the dislocation bisexuals feel in terms of bisexual identity and subjectivity, as demonstrated in the interviews in Chapter 3. Secondly, I demonstrate how understanding bisexuality as a liminal space assists queer theorising, positioning bisexuality as the liminal anti-structure between the socially constructed pillars of heterosexuality/heteronormativity and queer(ness).

Before I present my proposal, I want to quash any possible confusion concerning my application of liminality to bisexuality. Arnold van Gennep’s original definition of “liminal space” referred to the middle stage of rites of passage: transition rites.<sup>272</sup> Victor Turner then expanded the concept of liminality to encompass all types of secular and religious transitions, understanding liminality as a “state of mind.”<sup>273</sup> Both scholars understood the liminal period to be relatively short before the individual re-entered society.<sup>274</sup> A common misconception

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<sup>269</sup> Voss et al., “Embracing the “And,” [Abstract].

<sup>270</sup> Ibid., 1606.

<sup>271</sup> Ibid.

<sup>272</sup> Thomassen, *Liminality and the Modern*, 2.

<sup>273</sup> Ibid.

<sup>274</sup> Iver B. Neumann, "Introduction to the Forum on Liminality," *Review of International Studies* 38, no. 2 (2012): 473.



regarding bisexuality – as evidenced in Chapters 1 and 3 – is that individuals go through a “phase” of bisexuality before reaching their “true” sexuality: heterosexual or homosexual.<sup>275</sup> My application of liminality to bisexuality is in no way supporting the notion that bisexuality is a transitional phase individuals go through before reaching their true sexuality.

#### 4.1. *Liminality and Bisexual Identity/Subjectivity*

My application of liminality to bisexual identity/subjectivity is simple: it relies largely on the popular interpretation of liminality to describe being “between or belonging to two different places”.<sup>276</sup> It offers an alternative to the derogatory “fence-sitter” attributed to bisexuals to describe their “[choice] not to choose” between heterosexuality and homosexuality, while also acknowledging the “in-betweenness and indecision” demonstrated by the bisexual-identifying interviewees in Chapter 3 through the question of “where do I fit?”<sup>277</sup> The bisexual-identifying interviewees illustrated how they exist in the “liminal space” between heterosexuality and homosexuality, not fully belonging to either, but existing somewhere in the grey area between (1) and (5) on the Kinsey Scale of sexuality.

#### 4.2. *Liminality and Bisexual Epistemologies*

My employment of liminality to bisexual epistemologies is more complex, as I attempt to position bisexuality within Victor Turner’s framework in effort to demonstrate bisexuality’s deconstructive potential. Bisexual individuals can be seen as examples of Turner’s “liminal personae” (“threshold people”); the interviewees illustrated how bisexuals skirt the boundaries of heterosexuality and homosexuality without crossing the borders. This supports my application of liminality to bisexual subjectivity. However, by taking a metaphorical step back, we can see how bisexuality exists not only between heterosexuality and homosexuality, but also between the “straight world” and “queer world” associated with both sexualities, as I described in Chapter 3, supported by the interviews. This zooming out enables the positioning of bisexuality “betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention and ceremonial,” revealing the constructed nature of sexuality – and consequently gender – and supporting queer theory’s argument that bisexuality can deconstruct such

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<sup>275</sup> Roberts et al. “Between a Gay and a Straight Place,” 554.

<sup>276</sup> “Liminal,” in *Cambridge Dictionary* (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/liminal>.

<sup>277</sup> Whitney, “Cyborgs Among Us,” 119; Pramaggiore, “BI-Introduction I: Epistemologies of the Fence,” 3.

dichotomisations.<sup>278</sup> Furthermore, by situating bisexuality between these monosexual pillars – picture Kinsey’s Scale once more – following Turner’s argument, bisexuality becomes a liminal anti-structure. Existing in contrast to social structure, the anti-structure – comprised of *communitas* (a community in which individuals are equal and share a common experience) – rejects and subverts social norms. Bisexuality rejects the socially dominant monosexual paradigm and refuses to conform to fixed sexual object choice. Additionally, as evidenced in the interviews, bisexuals subvert and reject other social norms, such as an increased likelihood to see polyamory as an ideal and their ability to navigate traditional gender norms, particularly when in a relationship. Conceptualising bisexuality as a liminal anti-structure thus recognises the deconstructive potential of bisexuality – supporting queer theorising – in relation to sexuality and gendered binaries by positioning bisexuality between the “straight” and “queer” worlds.

I acknowledge that my framing of bisexuals as a *communitas* runs the risk of homogenising bisexuality, ignoring intersectional identities that undoubtedly create inequalities within the bisexual community. However, in recognising this, I maintain that the majority of bisexuals do share the common experience of bi-negativity and biphobia and are at least equal in their bisexual subjectivity in this way.

### *Conclusion*

Bjørn Thomassen asserted that liminality “ties together the micro and the macro, operating from ‘the middle’.”<sup>279</sup> My conceptualisation of bisexuality as a liminal space achieves this. Understanding bisexual existence as a liminal space aptly describes the dislocation and “in-betweenness” that the interviewees reported feeling because of their bisexuality. Framing bisexuality as Turner’s liminal anti-structure highlights the constructed nature of sexuality and gender binaries that queer theory looks to reveal and demonstrates the deconstructive potential of bisexuality as a tool of analytical inquiry. Thus, perceiving bisexuality as a liminal space “ties together” bisexual identity/subjectivity and bisexuality as an epistemological perspective, enabling the exploration of “the particular knot of bi as stable identity; bi as umbrella for a set of practices; and bi as deconstructive tool” needs to be explored simultaneously.<sup>280</sup> To do so

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<sup>278</sup> Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 359

<sup>279</sup> Thomassen, *Liminality and the Modern*, 7.

<sup>280</sup> Voss et al., “Embracing the “And”,” 1620.

ensures the lived reality of bisexuality is not overlooked in queer theorising of bisexuality as a tool of deconstruction.

## **Conclusion**

Heretofore, most efforts by bisexuality and queer theorists to add bisexuality to queer theory have resulted in reducing bisexuality to a tool of hypothetical inquiry, framing bisexuality as an epistemological perspective from which to deconstruct gender and sexuality categories. Epistemologically, bisexuality offers the optimal model for challenging socially constructed identities, rejecting monosexism and the centrality of gender in sexual object choice. However, theorising bisexuality in this way has resulted in the lived reality of bisexual existence consistently being overlooked, dampening the contribution of bisexuality to queer theory – and undermining the original efforts of bisexual activists and scholars to increase the visibility of bisexuality. This thesis aimed to explore how understanding bisexuality as a liminal space could enhance bisexuality’s contribution to queer theory by offering a way to simultaneously recognise bisexuality as an identity/subject position and as an epistemological perspective. Describing being “betwixt and between” socially constructed categories, liminality aptly encompasses this dual nature. The bisexual-identifying interviewees can be understood as “liminal personae” (“threshold people”), whose reported feelings of dislocation largely stemmed from their inability to fully conform to the categories of heterosexual or homosexual. Simultaneously, by positioning bisexuality between the socially constructed “straight world” and “queer world”, bisexuality can be understood as a liminal anti-structure, offering bisexuality as a deconstructive lens and demonstrating the benefits of utilising bisexuality as an epistemological perspective. Understanding bisexuality as a liminal space thus acknowledges how bisexuality can operate on different levels at the same time, without taking away from the significance of either.

In effort to centralise bisexual identity and subjectivity in my exploration of bisexuality as a liminal space, I grounded my research in the personal accounts of bisexual individuals. Using the combined method of thematic analysis and discourse analysis, I examined 9 interviews, conducted by me and provided by OurStory Scotland, highlighting 3 themes: Bi-Negativity/Biphobia; Need for Recognition, and; Feeling Between Two Worlds. Each theme related to existing bisexuality scholarship explored in Chapter 1 and supported my conceptualisation of bisexuality as a liminal space, clearly illustrating how bisexuality was continuously positioned within and between the heterosexual/homosexual binary. However, while my research supports the argument of bisexuality and queer theorists that bisexuality can and does destabilise sexuality and gendered binaries by highlighting their construction, it

remains that I analysed a small sample of interviews all embedded within a Scottish context. While my sample was a relatively accurate representation of the Scottish population generally, it was difficult to determine whether or not it accurately reflected Scotland's LGBTQ+ community. Furthermore, given that all of my interviewees were cisgender and White, my research lacked diversity, limiting an exploration of the influence of bisexual-identifying individuals' intersectional identities in their bisexual subjectivity. Therefore, while these factors somewhat limit the generalisability of the results, this approach offers an opportunity to explore the deconstructive potential of bisexuality without marginalising bisexual identity and experience. In fact, it offers a way to tie together both facets.

To fully understand the implications of my research, future studies would benefit from a broader sample size, both in terms of the number of participants and the diversity of the sample. This would allow for greater exploration of bisexual identity and subjectivity. Theorists should also continue to consider the relationship between sexual minority activism and sexuality scholarship, in effort to understand and highlight how theory has often mirrored practice, emulating certain biases, such as anti-bisexual attitudes. Queer theorists would particularly benefit from this consideration, as the inclusion of bisexuality would help the discipline transcend the heterosexual/homosexual binary and achieve its goal of deconstruction.

Ultimately, sustained engagement with bisexuality within any subsect of sexuality scholarship would greatly improve the discipline, shedding light on an orientation that continues to be largely ignored.

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## **Appendix 1: The Interviewees**

9 of the 27 interviews that I summarised during my internship with OurStory Scotland qualified for my research. The 9 interviews included a total of 12 participants. I conducted two interviews personally; the others were conducted by Jaime Valentine, the Chair of OurStory Scotland. Below I have provided basic information regarding the interviews and (when available) the interviewees (e.g. their gender [M/F]; their age at the time of the interview, and; why they were interviewed). While I do not have access to the interviewee's date of birth, their age can be approximated based on the content of the interview. Romantic partners mentioned by name have also been interviewed personally by OSS and have thus consented to their interviews being used for research and presentation purposes.

I have divided the interviewees between the categories that I outlined in Chapter 2: Methodology: the interviewee had to either a) identify as bisexual at the time of the interview; b) identify as bisexual previously, or c) have had sexual attraction/experiences with both same- and other-sexed individuals previously/presently or were open to the possibility of such attraction in the future, but did not identify as bisexual. The interviews are further organised chronologically. The \* indicate interviewees that appeared in more than one interview.

*a) identify as bisexual at the time of the interview:*

### **BiScotland (Glasgow, February 2004)**

- Group interview conducted by Jaime Valentine.
- Participants:
  - David [M]: aged 31, from Giffnock, East Renfrewshire
  - Sarah [F] (BiScotland founder): aged 38, from New Zealand, lives in Glasgow, Scotland [7 years]\*
  - JohnA [M]: aged 35, from Edinburgh
  - Angela [F]: aged 37, lives in Glasgow\*
  - Jeri [M]: aged 37, from Glasgow, lives in Lanarkshire



**Kate Fearnely [F] (Dalkeith, February 2018)**

- Solo interview conducted by Jaime Valentine.
- Age: late 50s/early 60s.
- Kate founded the Edinburgh Bisexual Group and one was of the key organisers of Edinburgh's first (the UK's third) Bisexual Conference (BiCon), "Bisexuality and the Politics of Sex" in 1985. Kate is married to Maruska Greenwood, the Chief Executive of LGBT Health and Wellbeing (an organisation that works to improve the health, wellbeing and equality of LGBT people in Scotland). OSS interviewed Maruska separately and also interviewed Kate and Maruska together; I did not include the paired interview in my research as Kate did not discuss anything that she had not also mentioned in her solo interview.

**Sarah Currier [F] (Stirling, April 2018)\***

- Solo interview conducted by Jaime Valentine.
- Age: 52/3
- Sarah grew up in New Zealand but moved to Scotland in her 30s, first living in Edinburgh and then in Glasgow. Her mother was Scottish. Sarah founded and ran BiGlasgow (a bisexual support group), which later became Bi Scotland, then Bi+Glasgow.

**Bi+Glasgow (Glasgow, March 2020)**

- Paired interview conducted by me and Dom Miller-Graham (another member of OurStory Scotland).
- Participants:
  - Angela [F] (now runs Bi+Glasgow; Sarah left BiGlasgow during the early 2010s): aged 52/53, lives in Glasgow\*. Angela realised she was bisexual when she was in her 30s.
  - JohnB [M] (not the same John that participated in the BiScotland 2004 interview): aged 50+, lives in Glasgow.

NB: Bi+Glasgow is a later edition of BiScotland. The group changed its name after being criticised for being exclusionary towards other plurisexual orientations (such as pansexual and omnisexual) and trans-exclusionary.

**Graham Checkley [M] (Edinburgh, March 2020)**

- Solo interview conducted by me.
- Age: 67
- Graham grew up in Newcastle, before moving to Edinburgh once he finished university. I met Graham's husband at an OSS event held during LGBT History Month, and he put me in contact with Graham after learning about my research.

*b) identify as bisexual previously:*

**Cordelia Ditton [F] (Stirling, June 2018)**

- Solo interview conducted by Jaime Valentine.
- Age: 64/65
- Cordelia is an actress and writer who co-directed "The Gay Sweatshop Theatre Company", which encouraged gay people to produce a season of gay plays and form a company. Cordelia was the founder of "Glasgay!", an LGBT+ arts festival held in Glasgow between 1993 and 2014. The festival was created in direct response to Section 28.
- Cordelia "went through a bisexual phase for about six months". She now identifies as lesbian.

**Lisa Charlwood-Green [F] (Stirling, June 2018)**

- Solo interview conducted by Jaime Valentine.
- Age: late 30s/early 40s.
- Lisa is the founder and Director of "The WOW Network", which is the only network in the UK that supports LGBT women in coming out at work. It was established in 2017 after a study found that 64% of women felt that they were unable to come out in the workplace.
- Lisa initially identified as bisexual during her teens and early 20s. She then identified as a gay woman, and now identifies as demisexual.

*c) have had sexual attraction/experiences with both same- and other-sexed individuals previously/presently or were open to the possibility of such attraction in the future, but did not identify as bisexual:*

**Louise Welsh [F] (Glasgow, April 2014)**

- Solo interview conducted by Jaime Valentine.
- Age: 49
- Louise is an author from London who lives in Glasgow. She is married to author Zoë Strachan.
- Louise now identifies as lesbian, but previously “didn’t really feel that [she] had to be pinned down” by labelling her sexuality. Louise expressed the opinion that she identifies as lesbian because she is in a long-term relationship with a woman.

**Stuart Duffy [M] (Stirling, June 2018)**

- Solo interview conducted by Jaime Valentine.
- Age: 40s
- Stuart is a digital multi-media journalist and the founder of the organisation “Pink Saltire”, which was established in 2014 with the aim of improving the representation of LGBTQ+ people in Scotland.
- Stuart identifies as gay “although [he has] been with women and men.”