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Moving out of the shadows: Accomplishing bisexual motherhood

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Moving out of the shadows: Accomplishing bisexual motherhood.**Abstract**

Our qualitative study explored the ways in which bisexual mothers came to identify as such and how they structured their relationships and parenting within hetero-patriarchal society. The experiences of seven self-identified White bisexual women (aged from 28 to 56-years-old) from across England and the Republic of Ireland were investigated through semi-structured interviews. Participants' children were aged 8 months to 28 years old at the time of their interviews. A thematic narrative analysis highlighted the following issues that participants had encountered in constructing their self-identity: prioritizing children; connecting and disconnecting with others and finessing self-definition; questioning societal relationship expectations. Nevertheless, participants varied considerably in how each of the themes identified were reflected in their lives, in particular depending upon each participant's interpretation of her local social context. Both motherhood and self-identifying as bisexual gave a sense of meaning and purpose to participants' life stories, although participants sometimes foregrounded their commitment to their children even at a personal cost to their bisexual identity. Using three different theoretical perspectives from feminist theory, queer theory and life course theory, the narratives analysed revealed ways in which bisexual motherhood not only had been influenced both intentionally and unintentionally by heteronormative expectations but also had directly and indirectly challenged these expectations.

KEYWORDS: bisexuality; parenting; motherhood; narrative analysis; self-identity.

Introduction

Research on lesbian parenting in North America and Western Europe has begun to deconstruct parenthood by stripping away the role that heterosexuality plays in motherhood by considering parenthood outside of heterosexual couple relationships (Stacey & Biblarz, 2001; Moore & Stambolis-Ruhstorfer, 2013). Studies on the effects of family structure versus family process on children's socioemotional development have emphasized that it is quality of family relationships that matter for developmental outcomes and not parental gender in two parent families (Golombok & Tasker, 2015; Lamb 2012; Parke, 2013). Yet for lesbian mothers who they are parenting with does matter for their experience and performance of motherhood: for example see Sullivan's (2004) study of 34 families headed by lesbian mothers in the U.S. who conceived their children via donor insemination. Biblarz and Stacey (2010) have commented that lesbians who plan parenthood together often organize a more egalitarian division of child care and family/household labor than do women in heterosexual couples. Nevertheless, lesbian mothers with children from a previous heterosexual relationship appear to be more likely than lesbians who planned parenting together to keep up a primary role in parenting upon entering a lesbian partnership (Tasker, 2013). Our research study based in the U.K. and the Republic of Ireland sought to find out more about how women who identified as bisexual narrated their motherhood and intimate relationships practices: how did holding a bisexual identity influence women's routes into motherhood and in particular how they viewed the way they practiced motherhood and their own intimate relationships?

Just as questions of women's sexual identity have begun to challenge the heteronormativity of motherhood, so parenthood has troubled the construction of nonheterosexual identities. S. M. Park (2013) has argued that queerness has resisted reproductive sexuality narratives and

both heteronormative and homonormative practices, stemming from the assumption that the responsibility-dependency dynamic around bringing up a child structures a parent's life in normative ways. Yet as S. M. Park has emphasized women parenting together in a variety of family structures troubles a cornerstone of heteronormative power: that a child can have only one mother and one father. Our study, influenced not only by queer theory perspectives (Butler, 1990, 1993, 2004) but also by ideas from feminist (Hesse-Biber, 2012) and life course theoretical perspectives (Bengston & Allen, 1993; Elder, 1998), sought to understand the extent to which bisexual mothers intentionally or unintentionally challenge heteronormative conceptualizations of the family as they narrated their lives.

Research on bisexual parenting

Despite a growing body of research into lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) parenting (Goldberg & Allen, 2013), the “B” in the acronym LGBTQ has been rarely acknowledged and very little research has been conducted into bisexual parenting (Ross & Dobinson, 2013). Most large scale quantitative research projects on LGBTQ parenting have recruited self-identified lesbian or gay parents with little attention to issues of self-definition and variation in sexual self-identity thus rendering other groups of non-heterosexual parents largely hidden in research to date (Tasker, 2013). Our study aimed to explore the processes involved in identifying as a bisexual mother through qualitative analyses of life story interviews with seven women.

The invisibility of bisexual parents in LGBTQ parenting studies can be related to a broader invisibility and erasure of bisexuality (Barker & Langdrige, 2008). The very diversity of bisexual definition possibilities may perhaps have helped to obscure the visibility of bisexual

identity, since the term bisexual can define adults who are sexually attracted to and/or have had sexual experiences with males, females, and/or gender diverse persons as reported in UK survey research (Barker, Bowes-Catton, Iantaffi, Cassidy & Brewer, 2008; Barker, Yockney, Richards, Jones, Bowes-Catton & Plowman, 2012). Further, as seen in research based in the US, individuals or communities may use other labels instead of, or as well as, bisexual to refer to their sexual identity, such as the terms pansexual, omnisexual, queer, sexually fluid, sexually flexible, or gay (Callis, 2014; Galupo, Davis, Gryniewicz, & R. C. Mitchell, 2014). Research in the U.K. with attendees at the annual United Kingdom Bisexual Conference has indicated that some self-defining bisexuals have multiple committed or non-committed relationships with partners of different genders, some have sequential relationships, and relationships may involve a variety of different types of sexual contact, or emotional intimacy, or both sexual and emotional intimacy (Barker et al., 2008). In our study the criterion for inclusion in the analysed sample was self-identity as a cisgender bisexual mother (i.e. women whose gender identity conformed to their biological sex at birth, who self-defined their sexual identity as bisexual, and who also identified as a parent). Our focus in a thematic analysis of interviews with bisexual mothers was on how they interpreted the variety of life experiences they had to self-identify as such. In the present paper we focus on the challenges bisexual mothers experienced in making this identification.

Given the scarcity of research on bisexual parenthood in the UK and elsewhere we have reviewed published studies on bisexual parenthood in English-speaking countries from North America and Australasia, accepting that the cultural context may nuance bisexual parenthood in different ways. Different accounts have demonstrated that individuals identifying as bisexual desired parenthood as much as those identifying as gay, lesbian, or heterosexual; see for example the first person accounts of a bisexual women in the U.S. provided by Arden (1996)

and Wells (2011). The Work, Love and Play study conducted in Australia and New Zealand has been one of the few recent on-line questionnaire studies of non-heterosexual parenting giving specific consideration to bisexual parenting as experienced by 48 respondents who self-identified bisexual parents (Power, Perlesz, Brown, Schofield, Pitts, McNair & Bickerdike, 2012). Eighty percent of participants were parenting their own biological children (either conceived through heterosexual intercourse (68%) or donor insemination (15%)) and 13% were parenting their partner's biological children or other children related to them (e.g. nieces or nephews). Furthermore, participants were living in diverse family situations and structures: 25% were raising children within the couple relationship in which the children had been conceived, while 75% had conceived their children through a previous relationship. For those bisexual participants currently in a relationship, 57% were involved with a same-gender partner and 30% with a partner of the other-gender. One participant described a family setting including more than two parents living in the same household and two participants mentioned romantic relationships including more than one partner. Most participants reported challenges related to co-parenting, especially after divorce or separation, such as conflicting values and parenting styles, communication issues, and difficulties for children in travelling between different households. Participants also reported difficulties with bi-prejudice (experiencing others making preconceived or biased judgements specifically on the basis of categorizing someone as bisexual).

While parents who identified as bisexual sometimes experience similar issues to parents who identified as lesbian or gay, there also are specific and particular bisexual challenges that they may encounter. In their call to expand research on bisexual parenting, Ross and Dobinson (2013) conducted a systematic literature review to find only seven papers reporting any considerations specific to bisexual parents. Specific bisexual challenges elucidated included: heterosexual passing (identified in various qualitative studies and first person accounts in the U.S.

(Arden, 1996) and Australia (Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2010 a&b)); feelings of invisibility (seen in a Canadian survey and small interview study of Canadian bisexual women in pregnancy and early motherhood Ross, Siegel, Dobinson, Epstein, & Steele, 2012); or studies detailing double discrimination experienced from both heterosexual and lesbian/gay social worlds (a qualitative study of bisexual women married to men in the U.S. (Moss, 2012) and a questionnaire survey and group interview study of attendees at the U.K. Bisexual Conference (Barker, Bowes-Catton, Iantaffi, Cassidy, & Brewer, 2008)). Watson (2014) interviewed a sex and gender diverse group of 47 Australians about their gender and sexual self-identification and their experiences related to these self-identifications. Watson's participants narrated a diverse array of experiences in their family of origin and within their current family form, which for some included their own children. Participants' accounts revealed how family environments varied in complex ways to operate both as sources of sanctuary or hostile or silent censorship for participants' expression of gender and sexual identity.

Theoretical perspectives on women's bisexuality and motherhood

In the present study we considered ideas from three distinct post-structuralist theoretical perspectives to examine women's bisexual self-identity construction and motherhood: feminist theory, queer theory, and the life course perspective. On the one hand, both feminist perspectives on women's empowerment in different social contexts, and queer psychology's focus on performativity, have largely neglected consideration of the development of self-concept over the lifespan and the role of family of creation in this (V. Mitchell, 2014). On the other hand, life course perspectives have considered lifespan influences in relation to family and social context, but mostly have not considered women's sexual

identities as other than heterosexual mothers and addressed the personal consequences of the performativity of oppressed positions (Allen & Henderson, in press).

Feminist perspectives and the U.K. context for bisexual mothers. Social justice and a concern to listen to the diverse voices of women who have been marginalized are established central tenets of feminist theory and research (Hesse-Biber, 2012). Feminist perspectives have enabled us to critically consider how power and the intersection of different group and self-identities interact in the context of family relationships within particular local and national cultural contexts (see Allen & Henderson, in press; Hesse-Biber, 2012). Yet as Golden in her analyses of radical feminist politics of the U.S. from the 1960s onwards has pointed out, some lesbian feminist perspectives have not always been sympathetic to different expressions of sexual self-identity including heterosexuality and bisexuality (Golden, 1994). We posited that feminism in a variety of diverse ways would feature in women's narratives in constructing an identity as a bisexual mother.

In line with feminist concerns about the specificity of cultural context we also considered the particular context of bisexual women and also mainstream motherhood in the U.K. Johnson (2012) refers to divisions within feminism in the U.K. and political hostility towards involvement with men and transgender groups, see for example Jeffreys (1999) specifically on lesbian feminist views of bisexuality. In particular in the U.K. tensions around sexual identity politics were heightened around opposition to section 28 of the Local Government Act (1988); section 28 stated that British local authorities (who control the provision of education in state-funded schools) should not promote teaching of homosexuality or the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship. The Local Government Act epitomized mainstream attitudes toward same-gender parenting until its removal from the statute books in 2003. Within LGBTQ communities and many

women's groups Section 28 became a rallying cause for opposition, yet within the opposition movement bisexuals were particularly vulnerable to being accused of passing as heterosexuals. Over the last three decades equal rights legislation and successive national social attitude surveys in the U.K. have revealed a considerable shift in public attitudes toward a generally more tolerant view of personal relationships including same-gender relationships (A. Park, Bryson, Clery, Curtice & Phillips, 2013). Nevertheless, over repeated survey waves older cohorts, those with fewer educational qualifications, and adherents of mainstream Christian and non-Christian religious groups have tended to express less accepting attitudes than others questioned.

The provision of family friendly work policies in the U.K. has lagged behind that in place in the more progressive countries in the European Union and U.K. households have faced some of the highest costs for child care in Europe (Norman, 2014). Nevertheless, the statutory provision of parental leave and child care in the U.K. generally has exceeded that available in the U.S (Waldfogel, 2001). Over the last three decades women with children at home in the U.K. have increased their levels of participation in both full-time and particularly part-time employment in the labor market, yet mothers continue to do the bulk of unpaid domestic work and child care in the home (A. Park et al., 2013). The cultural context within the U.K. thus appears to exert pressure on families with children to come up with private solutions to child care. This likely reinforces traditional gender roles in two parent mother-father families with motherhood engendering a sense of greater responsibility for children's daily physical and socioemotional welfare than that entailed in fatherhood.

Queer theory. Since the 1990s queer theory, based on Foucault's (1978) ideas concerning the operation of relational power through the production of sexual categories, has been challenging both lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender identity politics and feminist thinking about the

fixity of identities and power hierarchies (Clarke, Ellis, Peel & Riggs, 2010). An aim of queer theory in psychology is to examine how individuals and groups come to identify with and enact particular sexual categories (Warner, 2004). One of the key ideas within queer theory is Butler's (1990, 1993, 2004) concept of performativity in relation to gender and sexuality, i.e. that both are qualities that are perceived on the basis of what people do, or are seen to do, and that membership of a social category is actively produced and reproduced through this process and the discourse around it. Further, Butler has argued that discourse can reveal something about what can, or cannot, be said in a given context, thus bringing "into visibility the predicament of inclusion and exclusion as well as the difficulty of living that predicament or paradox" (Butler, 2006, p.533). If as Gibson has argued: "queering makes the things we otherwise take for granted suddenly unpredictable, uncooperative, and unexpected." (Gibson, 2014, p.1), then queer can be seen in the disturbance of heteronormative practices around motherhood as revealed through discourse.

In our study we considered how women narrated their maintenance and performance of a bisexual identity, and its visibility or invisibility in connection with motherhood, both in their presentation of their own thoughts and in how they thought others in their lives perceived them. If bisexual mothers parent queerly, then this would likely be evident in disruptions to the dominant ideology of motherhood presented in different ways or to different degrees within their narratives.

Life course perspective. Life course perspectives have highlighted the importance of historical context on the life span development of different cohorts, how this is mediated through nested proximal social contexts, and in particular how it is experienced and interpreted by an individual's family (Bengtson & Allen, 1993; Elder, 1998). Further, different social convoys influence development throughout the lifespan

(Kahn & Antonucci, 1980) and reciprocal influences within these social networks are emphasized by the concept of *linked lives* (Elder, 1994; Elder & Shanahan, 2006). Interpreting the life course perspective from the stance of an individual life span at a given point in time we would expect to see a narrative sequencing of life events that fitted in with, or reacted to, the various socioeconomic and cultural circumstances experienced especially at critical periods in an individual's development (see Bengtson, Biblarz & Roberts, 2002). One qualitative longitudinal study of four British women during pregnancy and early (heterosexual) motherhood found that the focus of the employed mothers-to-be shifted from concerns about work and career to focus more on the local context of family and friends (Smith, 1999). Smith's study thus highlighted the major impact of (heterosexual) motherhood on the social context of women's lives and how motherhood transformed both current focus and future life plans.

In our study we emphasized the social construction of self-identity, because of our concern with its fluid conceptualization within different social contexts over time particularly in relation to family relationships. We were interested to explore how participants saw the intersection between the different social identities and roles they claimed of *bisexual woman* and *mother* in the different social contexts within which our participants were located and to learn about these lived lives (Choo & Ferree, 2010; Marks & Leslie, 2000). We employed a thematic narrative analysis to analyse life story interviews, as narratives can give participants opportunities to present self and others over time in different social contexts and therefore highlight pivotal points in thinking often neglected by other discourse genres (Bamberg, 2004).

Prior research on bisexual parenting, as reviewed in the sub-section above, has begun to recognize the specific issues and challenges individual parents might face in constructing a bisexual identity. Nevertheless previous studies have hinted at more complex underlying issues

that could be explored in qualitative research examining life course pathways of self-identification. We reasoned that these issues might be more apparent at some stages of the life course than at others, particularly when taking into account the challenge of parenting children of different ages. We thus sought to conduct in-depth life story interviews with bisexual mothers of varying ages.

The current study

We focused our interview study on the following three research questions. First, what does doing bisexuality mean to self-identified bisexual mothers? In relation to this question we considered the varying ways in which bisexual mothers narrated their lives to portray and encompass attractions and/or relationships with different genders.

Second, we considered whether, and if so how, bisexual mothers' sexual identity considerations interacted with undertaking motherhood and vice versa? Here we anticipated that conceptual differences between sexual identity, attractions, and behaviours would be important and variably interconnected in women's stories (Diamond, 2008). We further expected that complex self-identities would integrate what to others may seem to be discrepant ingredients within monogamous, serial, or polygamous intimate relationships across a life course and that these adult intimate relationships may or may not be connected with the practice of motherhood.

Third, previous studies on bisexual identity have indicated that feelings of erasure and invisibility would likely be one of the main challenges bisexual mothers might face (Ross et al., 2012; Power et al., 2012). We anticipated that *heterosexual passing* may appear to be protective in facilitating the lives of bisexual parents and families, but also expected that *passing* would entail not only a political but also a

psychological cost too as sections of self-identity and experience went without acknowledgement. Limited social, emotional and practical support seemed to be linked not only to a lack of disclosure resulting in invisibility and social isolation, but also to the absence of specific bisexual communities and networks (Barker et al., 2008; Power et al., 2012; Ross et al., 2012; Rust, 1996). Thus we anticipated that identifying with other people who identified as bisexual would feature in the stories of the women we interviewed.

Method

Participants

After receiving ethical approval clearance from an Institutional Review Board, adverts for the UK Bisexuality Parenting Project were posted in a total of eight internet websites, 15 social network groups, and one mailing list. Participants were required to meet the following criteria: to be over 18; to be a parent of at least one child of any age; and either to identify as a bisexual parent or to relate to a bisexual parenting experience. A total of 14 individuals contacted the researchers, and of these seven were not included in the current study as they were men, did not identify as a bisexual mother, or were unavailable for interview within the timeframe of the project. In advertising our research project we invited readers of the advert to consider whether they would be able to help us make a difference in awareness and understanding of bisexual parenting by sharing their own life story of how they came to identify as a bisexual parent and how they found being a bisexual parent fitted in with their life and family relationships. Unlike other research projects, such as Watson's (2014) study, our recruitment focused on those identifying as a bisexual parent and did not employ a broader brief.

In total seven self-identified bisexual mothers completed a face-to-face interview in the U.K. (or a SkypeR interview in one the case of a participant from the Republic of Ireland) with one of the researchers between November 2012 and February 2013. Our seven participants were aged between 28 to 56 years old and all were cisgender women. All were White British or Irish, engaged in careers in middle class professions in occupations ranging from research and teaching through to various media professions. All participants were college educated: one had an undergraduate degree, four had masters' level degrees, and two had PhD qualifications. Further details of each participant's family life circumstances can be seen in Table 1.

Insert Table 1 about here

Participants' children were aged between 8 months to 28 years old at the time of interview. According to Carter and McGoldrick's conceptualization of the family life cycle, the mothers in our study were situated at different stages of family development (McGoldrick, Carter & Garcia-Preto, 2011). Andrea, Elena and Laura were raising children under 10 years old, Carrie and Suzie were parenting adolescents and young adults still living in the same household, and Barbara and Lynn were parenting adult autonomous children living in different household (participant chosen pseudonyms used). Therefore, these mothers were embedded in very different parenting contexts as they reflected on their identity development over the life course and faced different emotional and developmental tasks in their daily lives as bisexual mothers.

Procedure

Upon contacting the authors and expressing an interest in the project potential participants were provided with further information about the study and asked if they would be interested in participating. If so a time and place was arranged for their individual interview (mostly at their own home). Interviews lasted between 1 and 2.5 hours.

Potential participants were given the opportunity to look over the interview schedule prior to consenting to the interview. Examining the interview questions formed an important part of the ethical process of consenting to participate in the study and meant that participants had begun to frame their life course stories prior to telling them to the interviewer. We were mindful of the power dynamics of the research interview and wanted to give participants the opportunity to tell their lived experience as they wished and to ask questions about the researchers and the project (DeVault & Gross, 2012; Hesse-Biber, 2014). The relatively unstructured interview format gave participants the opportunity for their account to be presented to the interviewer (a White woman in her twenties) who appreciated rather than challenged their account and kept the research focus in mind when prompting or requesting additional explanation. The interview began with an invitation to the participant to tell the interviewer about how she came to define herself as a bisexual parent, how this fitted with other things that she did and the relationships she had. The interviewer also requested that the interviewee tell about her life as if it was a story with a beginning, middle, and future of how she saw her life developing. Generally interviewees told their stories with few pauses, while the interviewer actively listened giving simple verbal or non-verbal acknowledgement of the interviewee's point and making occasional requests for clarification or expansion as appropriate. Nevertheless included on the pre-seen interview schedule were five main sets of question areas, which the interviewer sometimes asked to keep the interview flowing or to ensure coverage of the research aim. These questions were: How did your parenting come about? When did you first become aware

or begin to define yourself as bisexual? Were/Are there people you didn't/don't tell? How has your parenting fitted in with the sexual and/or other important relationships that you have had and how have these relationships fitted around your parenting? How do these identities fit into other areas of your life such as work, your child(ren)'s school or being with other parents, with your extended family, with your partner(s), your friends?

All participants were given the opportunity to check their own transcript, and make any changes or clarifications they thought appropriate, before data analysis proceeded. Additionally, participants were invited to consider their transcript extracts and narratives within a draft report of findings from the project. The verbatim interview transcript extracts presented in this paper use the following notation: a short pause in narration ..., text removed (...), and text changed added for clarity or confidentiality [clarification].

Analysis plan

In our thematic analysis we took a descriptive perspective to identify common themes and challenges emerging from the participants' stories (see Bold, 2012; Hill & Dallos, 2011; Riessman, 2008). Each author conducted her own initial thematic analyses of each interview in turn making comments on the interview transcript about the issues present and their apparent meaning for that participant, highlighting key content words used by the participant as far as possible. Then both authors met for between an hour and 2 hours to discuss the thematic issues identified in each particular interview and reach an agreed version of sub-themes identified (i.e. if the authors did not agree on a sub-theme then it was not included in subsequent analyses). Each interview was contemplated and discussed in chronological order. Subsequently, similarities between the

agreed thematic issues raised across individual interviews were noted in further discussions between the authors and the sub-themes were then standardized across different participants' accounts. The sub-themes were then grouped by the authors into thematic groups (themes) reflecting common underlying issues that we discerned. Therefore, just as sub-themes précised material present only in some transcripts, particular themes were reflected more in some transcripts and not in others. The three themes identified are presented in Table 2, 3 and 4 respectively alongside their definitions, each theme's contributing sub-themes, and exemplar quotes. Sub-themes are indicated as present or absent in each interview transcript.

Insert Tables 2, 3 & 4 about here

Two quality control steps were used to audit our interpretations of the interview data. First, an independent audit of the each interview and narrative analyses notes was conducted by an experienced qualitative researcher who was unconnected with the research project to examine the analysis process (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). Second, an undergraduate research volunteer blindly rated three randomly chosen interviews to examine the correspondence between the author-identified themes and sub-themes in a thematic audit. Interview transcripts were rated for the presence, partial presence (somewhat apparent), or absence of each sub-theme in the transcript. Prior to coding the transcripts included in the thematic audit the research volunteer received training on an interview transcript that was not included audited sample. The results of the thematic audit are given in the additional ratings given to the audited interviews in Table 2, 3 and 4. The level of agreement between authors and the research volunteer is displayed in the Kappa values calculated for each theme respectively.

Results

Our thematic analysis focused on the content and inferred meaning of what interviewees had said rather than the story form each narrative had taken. Other narrative analyses have examined the structure of the life story narratives that bisexual mothers have told and the processes through which participants came to identify as a bisexual mother (Delvoye & Tasker, in press). Across the whole sample three main themes were identified that related to participants' experiences as bisexual mothers: 1) Prioritizing children; 2) Connecting or disconnecting with others and finessing self-definition; 3) Questioning societal relationship expectations.

Prioritizing children

During their interviews all participants conveyed the priority of their commitment to their children over other aspects of their lives. The formula *the children come first* seemed to underlie many of the participants' comments. The implications of prioritizing children were different for each participant, but generally their children came first in terms of allocating time and resources and topped the list of their emotional commitments. Seven sub-themes related to different considerations occasioned by the priority participants gave to their children: 1) Prominence and abeyance of parenting and sexual identity; 2) Extent of openness about bisexuality with their children; 3) Collaborating with co-parent for child's benefit; 4) Actively hiding; 5) Going along with others' assumptions; 6) Psychological and political costs of self-invisibility and erasure; 7) Activism but not out.

In relation to the first sub-theme (prominence and abeyance of parenting and sexual identity) four participants reported that they had given the bisexual part of their identity (or perhaps any sense of their sexuality at all) less importance, or perhaps had even been put on hold, when they were intensively caring for their young children. The overwhelming and intense needs of infants might explain the prominence of participants' parenting role and identity at this point in their lives. In her interview Carrie looked back on her prior experience of parenting young children: "*[being bisexual] was of the least importance to me because being a parent took over everything. (...) I was fully immersed in that kind of world of the 'under fives'. And so that role as a mother was much more dominant*".

Despite this abeyance of sexuality when participants' children were young, most of the mothers in our sample stated that they were still identifying as bisexual during that time and this identification constituted a core aspect of self-definition. For example, Laura said:

My parenting is quite deliberately within a bisexual context. Well, within a heterosexual relationship... but in which we both know the other isn't only heterosexual. That's really, really important to me, even if most days of the week it's only symbolic, it... it just feels really important to me at some sort of existential level.

For the mothers with older children in our sample, parenting demands and the psychological prominence of motherhood appeared to fade as children grew up. For example, by the time of her interview Carrie had enjoyed the cognitive space to consider, or return to, other identity projects. At this point in her parenting career, with more or less independent grown-up children, Carrie now lived with her female partner and previously had divorced her husband (her children's father).

The priority participants gave to their commitment to their children also could be seen in the second sub-theme in the data: the extent of each participant's openness about bisexuality with their children. This sub-theme reflected the various careful ways in which participants engaged in explaining how much of their sexual identity as a bisexual woman, or which details of their relationship lives, they had decided to share with their children. For example, Barbara had made the choice to be open with her children about her non-monogamous lifestyles, but had decided to keep her romantic and/or sexual partners separate from her family life. The main reason Barbara gave for her decision to keep partners separate was to avoid her children becoming emotionally attached to someone who might not stay involved in their lives.

In contrast, Suzie had disclosed her bisexual identity to her adolescent son and had connected him with this part of her life. In saying this Suzie also conveyed a sense of her own boundaries around sexual expression and indicated that by being open with her son about showing affection for another woman she could show her son that there was nothing wrong with this despite other people's prejudice. Suzie said: *"Obviously now my son knows that I'm bisexual and that I do date women so. (...) I mean not that he would be present when things happen, but included in the sense... not having to hide my affection for the woman that I'm involved with at the time as I have previously done."*

All five participants who had disclosed their sexual orientation to their children reported positive and supportive reactions. Nevertheless, three of them also mentioned that their children had different worries or concerns, which participants had accommodated to in accordance with the value they placed on prioritizing their children's well-being.

Two mothers said they had chosen to keep their romantic/sexual life separate from their children. This disconnection between their parenting and romantic/sexual experiences happened for different reasons, because the child was too young to fully understand sexual relationships, or because the child might be stigmatized because of their mother's relationships. For example, Andrea said:

I've never actually said to [my son]: "Look, I'm bisexual" because I don't see the point. It would require me to actually talk about sexual acts in a way that I don't think... I mean I've said things to him like: "You know some people love... some men love men, some women love women, some people love both." We've had those sorts of conversations. (...) But I cannot afford my child to be too sexually literate... because he goes to a Christian school and if we want to remain part of the community up here... this is quite a conservative area... well I can't have my child talking about bisexuality or condoms. (...) and so I think the stuff about bisexual orientation... we will deal with it. But it doesn't have to be tomorrow (laughs).

The third sub-theme, collaborating with co-parent for the benefit of the children, also indicated how participants put their children's perceived benefit from having two parents first, even if they themselves were no longer in a partnership with a co-parent. In current relationships too participants emphasized co-operating for the benefit of their children. For example, Laura's explanation of how she did not let her children meet her other lovers referred to her main partner's feelings about disclosing to their children. Laura and her main partner, who was also the father of her three children, had a non-monogamous relationship. In being open about their non-monogamous relationship they had to negotiate how to manage the connections between their other partners and their family life on which they had different opinions. Nevertheless, both Laura

and her partner put a priority on actively collaborating together as parents to establish a family agreement for their children and not sleeping with lovers in the house.

Laura: Kids add an extra dimension. It adds the dimension of what do we want them to know? And I feel very comfortable with them knowing and meeting other lovers, but their father doesn't. He feels a lot more guarded about that. (...) But that's definitely his preference, more than mine... but I'm fine with it.

In prioritizing their children participants were cautious about being out as a bisexual woman at their child's school because they valued their child's safety from the effects of prejudice and took into account their child's views on the likelihood of prejudice. Thus, the fourth sub-theme that was sometimes motivated by the underlying theme of prioritizing children reflected actively hiding. For example, Carrie's children worried about their peers and school staff finding out that their mother was in a same-gender relationship therefore Carrie actively hid this relationship. Once this issue was negotiated and resolved by Carrie accepting discretion in school related settings, Carrie's children became supportive of her and her relationship. Carrie's experience as mother of three teenagers was particular as she more or less simultaneously negotiated not only her personal disclosure as a bisexual mother, but also introduced her children to her same-gender relationship partner at the same time.

Carrie: They were very, very worried about that. And I can understand that because they were early teens going through secondary school and... well adolescence is a very, very sensitive time for young people because they're just establishing their own identities in

terms of gender and sexuality (...) I think the bit that upset me the most was that I really didn't want to ever put my children in a position where they had to lie about their circumstances. (...) It would have been much better if they could have been just open about that. However the reality of their world is that they could be bullied or picked on or abused in different ways because of that. (...) And I just felt I had to respect that.

Elsewhere in her interview, Carrie, like three other participants, also mentioned a different type of *heterosexual passing* in relation to prioritizing her children: simply keeping general social interactions smooth by not interrupting the supposition of heterosexuality that other people made (sub-theme five entitled going along with others' assumptions). Again participants referred to doing this to protect their children or to make their children's lives easier within the school context. Participants also sometimes mentioned that they felt that public statements about their sexuality would not be relevant in many contexts, such as work or health care settings as well as schools.

Participants acknowledged that the heterosexual passing entailed in actively hiding or going along with others' assumptions had some costs for them (sub-theme six: psychological and political costs of self-invisibility and erasure). The psychological costs to participants were seen as harsh as an important part of their self-identity went unrecognized. Costs of heterosexual passing were also seen in political terms in condoning heteronormativity as Andrea stated:

People sometimes think I'm heterosexual. And I'm aware that that is politically quite problematic. It's problematic because it reinforces heterosexual privileges. It's also problematic because psychologically there is a cost... there is a cost to not being out. Hum... but I've

done it... basically because there were enough challenges in my life. And I often feel that there are only so many battles you can fight at once.

Nonetheless, three other mothers felt they had been actively campaigning for equal rights, although they had not specifically come out as bisexual within that context (sub-theme seven: activism but not out). All three mothers had been involved in their children's school communities as a parent representative. These mothers reported fighting against discrimination of any type within the school context, including homophobia or bi-prejudice, not only reflecting their own activism but also their commitment to making the school community a more tolerant environment for their child to be in.

Connecting or disconnecting with others and finessing self-definition

Participants described various ways in which their self-definition as bisexual had been refined by connecting or disconnecting with others over their life course, the second theme in evident in all seven transcripts. Five sub-themes relating to this theme were evident in various ways and in varying degrees in different transcripts: 1) Focus on self-identity: personal importance of self-definition; 2) Others focus on performance; 3) Feminism connecting with sexual diversity; 4) Lesbian exclusion; 5) Importance of meeting others like me: bisexual home-coming.

Four participants highlighted the importance of bisexual identity in their own self-definition and representation of themselves. These participants highlighted the importance of how a person envisaged their self-identity and not the people they had intimate relationships with, or who they were sexually or emotionally attracted to (sub-theme one: focus on self-identity). Participants also advocated a more flexible labelling

of feelings and behavior, as they met with incomprehension or prejudice from others whom participants saw as rigidly concerned with behavioral definitions centered on who they were attracted to or had relationships with (sub-theme two: others focus on performance). In the extract below Lynn indicated both her own focus on identity and her partner's concentration on performance:

My partner doesn't understand why I still persist in identifying myself as bisexual when I haven't had a relationship with a woman for years (...). It's not the same as someone who has always been heterosexual. I feel much more at home in environments where queerness is taken for granted. I don't... If everybody is straight I don't feel comfortable.

All participants reported experiencing prejudice from others ranging from incomprehension (or a lack of understanding) to overt and aggressive anti-bisexuality behaviors. They had encountered blatant statements that “bisexuality was a phase” or even that “bisexuality didn't exist” from people in the mainstream and in non-heterosexual communities. All of them had encountered heterosexual assumptions when parenting with a male partner. As Andrea described below, other people focused on performance and did not consider identity.

Although I haven't been in a heterosexual relationship for most of the time that I've been a parent... I still refer back to my child's father and people think I'm heterosexual. (...) There is a massive assumption of heterosexuality... in the kind of informal parenting settings. So literally I would be in the park and people would start going on about their husbands and (...) I found that really painful (...) And because I was bisexual and all these talks around heterosexual relationships negated... I couldn't really go on and say: “Oh I had this really nice

date with this woman last night”! (laughs). Because obviously there is a lot of prejudice about lesbians. And there’s also prejudice about bisexuals.

Five participants had a feminist background: they were or had been involved in feminist movements or women groups. Being involved in feminist groups might broaden participants’ views on sexual diversity, and gave opportunities for same-gender relationships (sub-theme three: feminism connecting with sexual diversity). Nevertheless, often this was not enough for participants to feel accepted by the feminist groups they had been involved with. In fact feelings of lesbian exclusion were evident in six of the transcripts and these feelings were sometimes seen as having a profound influence on participants in terms of finessing their self-definition, their resilience and their resolve (sub-theme four: lesbian exclusion). For instance, Lynn recalled details of her relationships, thoughts, and feelings of exclusion when she was involved in feminist groups in her twenties.

My relationship with [her] kind of... ended... partly because I was going out with [him] (...) she... strongly identified as lesbian at that point... and... she and all the lesbians that I knew just dropped me... which I found quite hurtful. I was very... a very... active feminist at that point as well (...) I knew that there was... that it was possible to... be bisexual and also that it was good. But there were very, very, very little outside of me who said that that was okay.

All participants were involved in, or previously had been involved in, bisexual or general LGBTQ groups. These groups in particular provided the particular context for participants to self-identify or reaffirm self-identity when “meeting others like me” (sub-theme five:

importance of meeting others like me). Some of these groups were of an activist type whilst other groups were leisure groups (e.g., a bisexual sport group), support groups (e.g. psychotherapy group) or enabled sexual activities (e.g., fetish and BDSM networks). In various ways, these communities constituted a source of connection with like-minded others and support for participants and fulfilled some of their needs for recognition and belonging that had not been met with elsewhere. For example, Carrie conveyed a feeling of home-coming when she described the intensity of her feeling of recognition of self and like-minded others at a bisexual event:

When I first went to my first bi event and I was actually in a room where bisexual people were in the majority. And I basically just sat and cried for the most of it because it was just so overwhelming. (...) After so many years in the world of weirdness... to actually just... literally (...) just knowing that everybody was in the majority and that whole thing around identity just didn't need to be explained. It was... a very, very powerful experience for me at that time.

Questioning societal relationship expectations

Thematic analyses of the transcript data indicated that participants had come up against and questioned a number of societal relationship expectations when identifying as bisexual and in having sexual relationships with partners of both genders. We labelled this theme: questioning society's relationship definitions and expectations. Three sub-themes identified in some of the transcripts contributed to this theme: 1) Questioning gender role expectations; 2) Questioning monogamy; 3) Questioning the definition of sexual relationships.

The first sub-theme indicated how participants questioned hetero-patriarchal expectations of gender roles. Six participants reported either bringing their children up outside of traditional gender roles and/or described difficulties with men in intimate relationships, who expected them to behave in traditional ways, infringing upon their feminist ideas. For example, Andrea said:

He felt threatened by my feminism as well. Because I've always been a feminist (...) and I wouldn't fit into... He's quite patriarchal in his relationship's assumptions. You know (...) he would ultimately assume that he was the boss. And that meant I just wasn't happy. I couldn't do that. So as a bisexual feminist... there was a tension in that relationship.

Most participants reported questioning societal expectations of monogamy (sub-theme two). Carrie and Elena were the only two participants who did not report any questioning of monogamy: they both stated their current involvement in a monogamous relationship and showed no signs of considering another way of being romantically or sexually involved.

Barbara identified as polyamorous as well as bisexual and did not have a main partner at the time of her interview. Laura and Suzie also were involved in non-monogamous relationships at the time they were interviewed and had both negotiated their own non-monogamy with their main partner (in both cases their main partner was a man). Questioning socially established norms led participants to improvise, or develop, new scripts to relate to people in their personal lives and these new relationship scripts entailed lots of negotiation and communication with partners, who in turn had to be willing to engage in this. Andrea and Carrie both described how an important relationship had ended and indicated that their male ex-partners had felt insecure, which ex-partners had blamed on Andrea and Carrie's bisexual identities as they feared the absence of

exclusivity. However, Suzie described her husband's response and how their relationship had been renegotiated successfully when Suzie came out as bisexual. Nevertheless, as Suzie added later in the interview it was not always easy to navigate a solution or in her words: "*it's not plain sailing*".

Suzie: He said: "Well essentially, it's something that I can't give you. I don't have the parts. I'm not female." And then... after a while he told me: "As long as you don't plan on leaving me for a woman, I don't really have a problem with it." (...) So I was given free rein to date women. (...) Originally it wasn't the plan that people I was involved with would get involved with my husband as well but it ended up that way with two people. It's whatever you make it to be, I suppose.

Even two of the participants (Lynn and Andrea) who expressed a commitment to monogamy shared concerns related to relationship definitions and expectations concerning monogamy. Lynn scrutinized the traditional patriarchal model of coupledness and nuclear family in questioning concepts of monogamy and societal expectations of fusion in a couple. Yet Lynn still committed to a monogamous relationship with her male partner.

Andrea mainly reported a history of involvement in monogamous relationships, but she felt comfortable navigating in the emotional grey area between friendship and relationship and she herself had begun to question the very definition of what a sexual or intimate relationship was (sub-theme three).

Andrea: I think the monogamous or non-monogamous thing for me is still something I've not resolved basically. (...) I have an extremely intense emotional relationship with a female friend and sometimes we cuddle. Does that count as a relationship? Well... I don't know! (laughs). So I think these definitions are quite difficult. I think as a bisexual person I'm not ever going to not feel things for different people. I can't ever be completely emotionally monogamous. But then... a lot of non-bisexual people also have other strong connections they just frame in other ways. They call it friendships. So I don't think we should hang up on these definitions to be honest.

Discussion

In relation to our research questions we explored the narrative themes underpinning bisexual mothers' constructions of their self-identities of motherhood and bisexuality and considered the role heterosexual passing played or did not play in bisexual mothers' lives. Our findings speak to how bisexual mothers addressed these issues in their lives. Participants prioritized their children in narrating their accounts of accomplishing compatible sexual and motherhood identities, but their accounts revealed differences in the way this was achieved. Heterosexual passing was sometimes seen as necessary because of the perceived need to prioritize children. Sometimes participants felt alone in sustaining a bisexual self-identity and made a huge psychological effort to sustain it against others' presumptions of heterosexuality when motherhood came about within an other-gender relationship. Bisexual identity was experienced as a vital part of self-definition and was constructed or maintained by connecting with, or disconnecting from, others. In announcing or doing bisexuality participants' self-reflections sometimes collided both with lesbian feminist expectations and with heterosexual others' definitions of bisexuality and brought about the questioning of hetero-patriarchal relationship expectations.

Our analyses have provided a qualitative look into the experiences of only seven White college-educated bisexual cisgender women, all of whom had been involved in LGBTQ communities to some extent. Further work with a larger and more representative sample is needed to clarify completely the three main themes identified in our narrative thematic analyses. Accepting our initial inter-coder reliability by including as present in the transcript instances where the theme was only somewhat apparent to the auditor, then all three main themes can be considered as reliable. However, if we assume the more conservative values of Kappa generated in our inter-coder reliability analyses, only our first theme (prioritizing children) was within Landis and Koch's (1977) highest level of reliability (Kappa >.81).

All our bisexual parents were mothers who had brought up their own genetic offspring from their child's birth and had conceived their child in an other-gender relationship. We would not expect our findings to generalize to bisexual fathers or to other non-binary identities. Mitchell, Davis and Galupo's (2014) results from their online survey in the US can be illustrative of such variation in experience as they found that bisexual adults reported more instances of sexual prejudice from lesbians and gay men (but not heterosexual individuals) than did adults who self-identified as pansexual, queer or fluid. Furthermore, insights from our study may necessarily be limited to the ethnic, educational and social class features of our sample (DeVault & Gross, 2012) or to participants' location in the relatively traditional cultural environment of mainstream motherhood in the U.K. and Republic of Ireland. Nevertheless, the variety of ways of defining bisexual motherhood expressed by the women in this group, and their varied stories over time, seem to indicate that many definitions are possible. Our findings concur with Peplau and Garnett's conclusions on the fluidity and complexity of women's constructions of an integrative self-identity: "women may have complex self-identities that can encompass seemingly discrepant ingredients" (Peplau & Garnett, 2000, p.334). To further understand the particular

factors and processes in self-identity future studies could analyse the narration process over the lifespan, or could focus on likely pivotal points in the lifespan such as entry into motherhood or when grown up children leave home.

Sampling the narratives of bisexual mothers with children of varied ages and our use of the feminist and life course perspectives enabled us to foreground how a sense of a bisexual self-identity changed with women's empowerment within their familial and social context. Participants conveyed a sense of priority in placing their children's needs above their own self-identity. This priority was particularly apparent when mothers spoke about parenting young children, their commitment to co-parenting with the children's father, and the need to oversee their children's passage through school. It was also often easier to ignore and not challenge others' assumptions of their heterosexuality, which effectively rendered their bisexuality invisible while it smoothed their interactions with others particularly concerning their children. Most of the mothers in our sample however stated that they were still identifying as bisexual and this identification constituted a core part of their self-definition. While some of them chose to keep their romantic and sexual life separate from their parenting and family life, others chose to allow a connection between these two parts of their lives and identities but all put forward particular considerations about their children as the reason for the integration or the compartmentalization of their lives.

Queer theory's focus on performance enabled us to consider how each participant 'did' bisexuality in their own life. For instance, attending bisexual or queer events helped participants to feel more bisexual, doing heterosexual passing either actively or passively made our participants feel painfully invisible. Others in participants' lives often emphasized performance and sometimes disregarded participants' claims to a bisexual identity. Nevertheless, our participants continued to highlight the subjective importance of their self-definition as bisexual and this

appeared more significant for them than the performance aspects of their sexuality, especially when they were otherwise preoccupied with motherhood. While there are many different definitions of bisexuality, and much unresolved definitional uncertainty (Halperin, 2009), our participants cherished their own self-definitions as bisexual. 'Bisexual' held a sense of personal meaning and purpose for our participants as they narrated their life stories. Yet participants' self-understanding was often obscured as others in their lives focused in on *performance* as the key factor in defining sexuality; a reflection that seemed to mirror the theoretical bypassing of bisexuality by queer theory (see Callis, 2009).

Feminist ideas on gender equality influenced how our participants related to men as partners and their ideas on bringing up their children. A strong feminist sense of each woman's entitlement to her own self-identity perhaps also enabled participants to sometimes produce counter-narratives that resisted prevailing master narratives of heteropatriarchy (Bamberg, 2004). Yet at other times participants were complicit with master narratives in conveying their own story, for instance in heterosexual passing. As reported in previous research our bisexual mothers encountered discrimination and prejudice from the heterosexual mainstream world and also from within the feminist and LGBTQ community (Ross et al., 2012; Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2010a; Barker et al., 2008). These experiences initiated further questioning and exploration of their sexual identities by participants and in doing this they sometimes postponed bisexual identification. Our findings point to the important role of bisexual others and community groups in confirming or prompting a bisexual identification (Rust, 1996). Perhaps the tenacity of participants' bisexual definition was in part a reflection of many of our participants' associations with bisexual groups and confirmed the important role of identifying others 'like me' in living a marginalized life.

Actively living, or even simply considering, their own bisexual identity raised questions for participants concerning relationship expectations or western social norms about monogamy and even the definition of what constituted a sexual or emotionally intimate relationship. Yet most of our participants had not constructed their families as did the non-monogamous poly-families by described by Sheff (2010) and Pallotta-Chiarolli (2006; 2010 a&b). With the priority our participants gave as mothers to their children, who were seen as having paramount needs to their own, the women in our study could be seen as quietly questioning rather than actively queering since they rarely issued an overt challenge to heteronormative expectations. Yet in other ways the women in our study both directly and indirectly strove for acknowledgement of a non-dichotomous view of sexual identity within their family and sometimes beyond too. If, as Gibson has argued “queering is understood beyond individual identity and toward a consideration of how relationships, communities, genders, and sexualities might proceed otherwise” (Gibson, 2014, p.6), then the non-trans bisexual women in our study queered motherhood in some ways at some points in time. S. M. Park (2013) has argued that kinship practices in any one type of non-traditional family can both resist and replicate heteronormative practices of family and this complex positioning seemed to capture the dilemma the women in our study faced as they preserved self and prioritized their children.

Conclusion

For our participants both motherhood and self-identifying as bisexual gave a sense of meaning and purpose to their life experiences and life plans, yet they each had different life stories of various relationship experiences. A major theme present in the narratives of all the bisexual mothers who participated in our study was their prioritization of their commitment to their children, even at a personal cost to their own self-

definition of a bisexual identity. Thematic narrative analyses highlighted clashes of self-definition and others' definitions of bisexuality and social acceptability.

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Table 1. Participant information.

Pseudonym	Age range	Current relationship status	Children
Elena	Mid-twenties	Married to a male partner	1 son under ten years old
Suzie	Mid-thirties	Married to a male partner Casually dating women	1 teenage son
Laura	Mid-forties	Living with a male partner and in a casual relationship with a male partner	3 children under ten years old
Andrea	Mid-forties	Single Casual sexual relationship with a male partner Intimate non-sexual friendship with a female partner	Son under ten years old
Carrie	Mid-forties	Divorced from a male partner Living with a female partner	3 teenage & adult children
Barbara	Mid-fifties	Single Casual relationship (partner's gender unknown)	2 adult children
Lynn	Mid-fifties	Living with a male partner	1 adult son

Table 2. Prioritizing Children (theme 1 and associated sub-themes).

Theme	Definition	Sub-themes	Pseudonym initials and presence of sub-theme						
			Elena	Suzie	Laura	Andrea	Carrie	Barbara	Lynn
Prioritizing children (Kappa ¹ =1.0)	Perceived responsibilities of parenthood put first, e.g. <i>“Obviously my child always has to come first, basically”</i> (Andrea)	Prominence and abeyance of parenting and sexual identity, e.g. <i>“You barely got time to even think about yourself (laughs). (...) just trying to be a parent and have any sort of sexual identity is quite hard! It doesn’t matter if you’re gay or straight or bisexual.”</i> (Elena)	X ₁	O	O ₃	X	X ₁	X	O
	But still bisexual despite personal costs e.g. <i>“being a parent took over everything (...) Although if anybody had ever asked me [about my bisexual identity] that would have been exactly how I would define myself.”</i> (Carrie)	Extent of openness about bisexuality with children, e.g. <i>“[it’s] fine as long as you don’t rattle their world.”</i> (Barbara)	X ₂	X	O ₃	O	X ₁	X	X
		Collaborating with co-parent for child’s benefit, e.g. <i>“He’s been a good father to the children. He hasn’t been always a good partner to me (...) but ... I think he’s a good person.”</i> (Barbara).	O ₃	X	X ₁	X	O ₃	X	X
		Actively hiding, e.g. <i>“So we agreed then that I would be very discreet about my relationship”</i> (Carrie)	O ₃	O	O ₃	O	X ₁	O	O
		Going along with others’ assumptions, e.g. <i>“If it comes up... like I... hum... I’d be honest about it but I don’t... come out like... every time I meet a new person”</i> (Elena)	X ₁	O	O ₃	X	X ₁	O	X
		Psychological and political costs of self-invisibility and erasure, e.g.. <i>“there was a bit of me that was always in the shadows”</i> (Carrie)	X ₁	O	O ₃	X	X ₁	O	O
		Activism but not out, e.g. <i>“I’ve never had a personal conversation [with the teacher] but he knows I’ll do LGBT training for the teaching staff if they want.”</i> (Laura)	O ₃	X	X ₁	O	O ₃	X	O

Key to table: X= presence of sub-theme in transcript as agreed by authors and O =absence of sub-theme. Subscript 1,2,3 presence or absence of sub-theme in transcript as indicated at thematic audit where: 1= clearly present; 2= somewhat apparent; 3= not present. $Kappa^1$ calculated by comparing author coding with thematic audit recoded as present (clearly present or somewhat apparent) vs. not present. For theme 1 $Kappa^1=1$. If Kappa is recalculated to compare author coding with thematic audit recoded as present (clearly present) vs. absent (somewhat apparent or not present) then theme 1 $Kappa=.905$

Table 3. Connecting or disconnecting with others and finessing self-definition (theme 2 and associated sub-themes).

Theme (Kappa)	Definition	Sub-themes	Pseudonym initials and presence of sub-theme						
			Elena	Suzie	Laura	Andrea	Carrie	Barbara	Lynn
Connecting or disconnecting with others and finessing self-definition (Kappa ¹ =1.0)	Clashing or empathetic definitions of bisexual identity between self and others, e.g. <i>“I knew that there was... that it was possible to... be bisexual and also that it was good. But there were very, very, very [few] outside of me who said that that was okay.”</i> (Lynn)	Focus on self-identity: Personal importance of self-definition, e.g. <i>“But bisexuality is also... it’s about my history. It’s about all the ways I look at the world.”</i> (Lynn)	X ₁	O	O ₃	X	X ₂	O	X
		Others focus on performance: Incomprehension or prejudice from others, e.g. <i>“People going on and on... like: ‘No, there’s not such a thing... you’re straight... bla bla bla...’”</i> (Elena)	X ₁	X	X ₁	X	X ₁	X	X
		Feminism connecting with sexual diversity, e.g. <i>“So I met a couple of really lovely women, one of whom I’m still in touch with, who were feminists. And one was definitely bisexual. The other one I don’t really know.”</i> (Barbara)	O ₃	O	X ₁	X	X ₁	X	X
		Lesbian exclusion, e.g. <i>“Certainly I’ve met negative reactions concerning bisexuality (...) the most vicious negativity has always come from lesbian women”</i> (Carrie)	X ₁	O	X ₁	X	X ₁	X	X
		Importance of meeting others like me: bisexual home-coming, e.g. <i>“And I am involved in the bisexual community now. And I find that very useful. I mean they are like a family really”</i> (Andrea)	X ₁	X	X ₂	X	X ₁	X	X

Key to table: X= presence of sub-theme in transcript as agreed by authors and O =absence of sub-theme. Subscript 1,2,3 presence or absence of sub-theme in transcript as indicated at thematic audit where: 1= clearly present; 2= somewhat apparent; 3= not present. Kappa¹ calculated by comparing author coding with thematic audit recoded as present (clearly present or somewhat apparent) vs. not present. For theme 2 Kappa¹=1. If Kappa is recalculated to compare author coding with thematic audit recoded as present (clearly present) vs. absent (somewhat apparent or not present) then theme 2 Kappa=.595

Table 4. Connecting or disconnecting with others and finessing self-definition (theme 3 and associated sub-themes).

Theme (Kappa)	Definition	Sub-themes	Pseudonym initials and presence of sub-theme						
			Elena	Suzie	Laura	Andrea	Carrie	Barbara	Lynn
Questioning society's relationship expectations (Kappa ¹ =1.0)	Bisexual identity opens questions about societal expectations, e.g. <i>"once you start questioning one construct, you don't see any reason [...] not to question the others."</i> Barbara	Questioning gender roles, e.g. <i>"as un-gendered as possible"</i> (Elena)	X ₂	X	X ₁	X	O ₃	X	X
		Questioning monogamy, e.g. <i>"We're strong within ourselves as a couple so that means we can have outside people without it causing too much of an upset."</i> (Suzie)	O ₃	X	X ₁	X	O ₃	X	X
		Questioning the definition of a sexual relationship, e.g. <i>"I also think there is the problem of definition... what counts as sex?"</i> (Andrea)	O ₃	O	O ₃	X	O ₃	O	O

Key to table: X= presence of sub-theme in transcript as agreed by authors and O =absence of sub-theme. Subscript 1,2,3 presence or absence of sub-theme in transcript as indicated at thematic audit where: 1= clearly present; 2= somewhat apparent; 3= not present. Kappa¹ calculated by comparing author coding with thematic audit recoded as present (clearly present or somewhat apparent) vs. not present. For theme 3 Kappa¹=1. If Kappa is recalculated to compare author coding with thematic audit recoded as present (clearly present) vs. absent (somewhat apparent or not present) then theme 3 Kappa=.727.