BISEXUAL CHRISTIAN IDENTITY:

A SOCIOLOGICAL EXPLORATION OF THE LIFE STORIES OF FEMALE AND MALE BISEXUAL CHRISTIANS.

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ABSTRACT

This research project is an investigation into the lives of bisexual men and women who are also Christian. It is a sociological exploration of their identity and the negotiations which they undertake against the backdrop of a religion that sees their sexuality as a choice and fails to fully grasp the complexity of bisexuality, and a society that does not understand their sexuality. Bisexual Christians are an under-researched group, yet researching such a group can speak to sociological understandings of identity, sexuality and religion.

This research project has found that identity is a complex negotiation between the private, public but also the situational/the context in which it occurs. Identity is a project of reflexive choice but within these confines and always with regard to the context in which they are being negotiated and done. Such negotiations take place around a 'core' identity which helps the respondents to feel grounded throughout. Bisexuality itself is misunderstood both within the secular and religious spheres. The research calls for bisexuality to be understood in terms of 'dimensions' of sexuality which carry different weightings for individuals, rather than producing a universal definition. Bisexuality challenges both monosexism and heterosexism that exists within secular and religious society. In terms of their religious lives the research has found that religious individualism and the 'Turn to Life' (Heelas and Woodhead 2005, Woodhead 2001) is more heightened within the lives of bisexual Christians because of the points highlighted above. Without any guidance and both a society and a religion which does not understand bisexuality, the

respondents are left to creatively understand and give life and meaning to both their religious faith and their sexuality.

PUBLICATION STATUS OF THE CHAPTERS

The thesis has resulted in the following publications. It must be noted that these papers are not based upon the chapters themselves, rather some of the themes (or emerging themes) from the research project. The thesis itself therefore, is entirely original.

Toft, A. 2009. 'Negotiating Identity: Life Narratives of Bisexual Christians'. In: Robinson, D. & Fisher, P et al (eds). *Narrative, Memory and Identities.* Huddersfield: University of Huddersfield.

Toft, A. 2009. 'Bisexual Christians: The Life-Stories of a Marginalised Community'. In: Hunt, S. (ed). *Contemporary Christianity and LGBT Sexualities.* Aldershot: Ashgate.

Toft, A. (forthcoming). 'Researching Bisexuality and Christianity: Locating a hidden population and the implementation of research methods'. In: Phellas, C. N. *Research Non-heterosexual Sexualities.* Aldershot: Ashgate.

Toft, A. (forthcoming). 'Bisexuality and Christianity: Negotiating Disparate Identities'. In: Hunt, S., & Yip, A. K. T. (eds). *The Ashgate Research Companion to Sexuality and Religion.* Aldershot: Ashgate.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The first chapter of the thesis will discuss the aims of the research and the questions that the research project will address. There will also be a consideration of how the work will contribute to existing knowledge and the impact the research will have upon sociological theory. The overall aim of the chapter is to outline what the research is about whilst contextualising the subsequent chapters. In order to do this the chapter opens with a brief contextualisation of the research and the topical landscape to which it will contribute.

CONTEXUALISING THE RESEARCH PROJECT

The issue of sexuality and Christianity is a point of debate that continues to attract public attention and one which continues to divide opinion in both religious and secular spheres. The debate was brought to the wider public attention with the nomination of Jeffery John to the post of Bishop of Reading in 2001, a nomination which he later withdrew because of mounting pressure. Furthermore, John himself felt that his ordination might have threatened the unity of the Church (Gledhill 2003). The debate has split the Church of England even though Catholic Press has applauded his observance of the Catechisms of the Catholic Church by staying celibate (Oddie 2010). In June 2010 John was shortlisted as a candidate to become the Bishop of Southwark (Wynne-Jones 2010). It has been suggested however, that after debate his name was removed (Butt 2010).

The issue of bisexuality within organised Christianity remains hidden away. In 2008 for example in the US, Honor Moore wrote of her father Paul, a man who had 9 children yet also had homosexual encounters after their marriage broke down (Moore 2008). It is summarised that Moore was in fact gay all along, with bisexuality not being considered, further highlighting the invisibility of bisexuality and its misunderstanding.

Such debate has been focussed upon the issue of homosexuality and whether it is acceptable in Christianity. Progress seems to have been made within wider society with a recent proliferation of legislation aimed towards creating equality for gay men and lesbians. Gay men and lesbians can serve in the armed forces (2000), adopt children (2002) and most recently with the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act (2008), undergo artificial insemination to have a child of their own. Such progress is not evident within the Christian Church in general as traditions are denied to those who are not heterosexual, weddings, for example, have not yet been entirely extended to same-sex couples, although exceptions occur within certain denominations.

It is within this milieu that this research takes place. However, the area of investigation here is more challenging to the Church because understandings of what bisexuality is are inaccurate. Bisexuality has not caught the headlines in the same way as homosexuality because in general (particularly within the Anglican Church) those who are bisexual are seen as being able to choose between heterosexuality and homosexuality. Therefore understandings are plagued with monosexism (the assertion that everyone in society is only attracted to members of one sex) and heterosexism (the cultural domination of heterosexuality in what is sexually acceptable), an argument that I will develop throughout. Furthermore, bisexuality is misunderstood by wider society. Bisexuality occupies a space which is seem as sexual no-man's-land, an identity which cannot be recognised because it has no opposite, as homosexuality is to heterosexuality. It is therefore

imperative to explore what it is about bisexuality that does not fit with Christianity (if this is indeed the case- as it is popularly portrayed) but also vice-versa, what it is about Christianity that does not fit with bisexuality. The Church of England's official statements published as 'Issues in Human Sexuality: A Statement by the House of Bishops of the General Synod of the Church of England' (1991) and 'Some Issues in Human Sexuality: A Guide to the Debate' (2005), are key in understanding why bisexuality is even more misunderstood compared to homosexuality. The statements see bisexuality as inevitably adulterous, as a confused form of sexuality and most contentiously they assert that bisexuals can choose to be either heterosexual or homosexual. This document will be explored in greater detail during Chapter 4 but it is important to note that the Church of England assert that bisexuality is distinct from homosexuality.

It is within this scenario of misunderstanding, yet with growing debate about homosexuality, that this research project is located. Here we move to explore what the research project is all about and what it hopes to achieve.

RESEARCH AIMS AND QUESTIONS

The thesis title: 'Bisexual Christian Identity: A Sociological Exploration of the Life-Stories of Female and Male Bisexual Christians' outlines the focus of the thesis effectively, but it is important to break this down and explore the nuances of the research project. The thesis principally is an exploration of what it means to be both bisexual and Christian. How is it possible for individuals to be both bisexual and Christian when in both religious and popular discourse these identities are in opposition to each other and perhaps

even in conflict? Throughout the research process people questioned whether or not being bisexual and Christian was even possible and that being bisexual and Christian does not make sense. However, it does make sense and there are people doing it in their lives every day. This research is an exploration of how 80 people negotiate and live as bisexual and Christian individuals. The research is primarily concerned with their lives in terms of their sexuality and their faith with the underlying question throughout being what negotiations take place within each of these for them to do so. It may of course be the case that they do not fit together in complete equilibrium and one takes the forefront. Even if this is the case, the question remains how is this done? Such negotiations take place both within the private and public spheres and the research will explore not only how concepts are internalised but how they are enacted in relation to wider society and the tensions that this creates. The contexts in which such negotiations take place are vital to explore and highlight the divide between the public and private.

The research project has three major aims. I will deal with each aim individually in order to expand. This will also enable me to highlight the research questions which have been constructed based upon the research aims.

1. To explore how identity is negotiated and done through the self-definitions respondents constructed of bisexuality within the private sphere.

The first aim is to explore what it means to be bisexual. This involves looking at the way the respondents' self-defined their sexuality and the meaning they gave to their own sexuality. However, in order to explore bisexuality it is important to look at what bisexuality means in a wider context so the thesis explores what bisexuality means in the

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public sphere also. Here the focus also shifts to how bisexuality is done rather than how it is internally constructed or imagined. The differences between the two will highlight the challenges that bisexual individuals face. Although, as will become clear, universal definitions are impractical and perhaps not possible, it is important to consider some of the commonalities and threads of similarities that exist within the sample. There are many research questions which emerge from this:

- How do bisexual individuals define their own sexuality?
- What are the similarities and differences between these self-definitions and how bisexuality is 'done'?
- How important are external influences in shaping bisexuality (such as support groups)?

2. To explore what it means to self-define as Christian and how such an identity is constructed and negotiated within the private sphere (as a bisexual individual).

The thesis aims to also look at the individuals in terms of faith (Christianity). Here the focus shifts to exploring what it means to be Christian and how the respondents understood their faith as bisexual individuals. Research questions that emerge are:

- What does it mean to be Christian in the contemporary society?
- What does Christianity mean to the respondents? This leads on to the way that Christianity is conceptualised and what believing means.
- How important is the Bible?

- Do bisexual Christians attend Church?

- What is it about Christianity that is challenging to bisexuality?

3. To explore how bisexual Christians construct, manage and negotiate their identities within the private and public spheres against the pressures of external forces.

The third aim is to look at how the respondents were able to be both bisexual and Christian. This meant looking at what happened to bisexuality and Christianity in order for reconciliation to come about, or whether something did need to happen to either to achieve such reconciliation. The strategies and techniques used were of interest and also the role that interaction with wider society plays.

- What identity negotiations take place in order to be bisexual and Christian?

- Do complex re-conceptions of both bisexuality and Christianity need to take place in order to fit bisexuality with Christianity?

- What strategies and techniques did the respondents use?

- What impact does social life have upon the identity of bisexual Christians?

- How are relationships, support and Church life 'done' in the lives of bisexual Christians?

Due to the exploratory nature of the research the aims were kept rather broad but focussed upon a couple of sociological themes in order to let the data speak but within a small enough context for the data to be of use. Having outlined the research itself I would like to signpost how this research contributes to existing knowledge. It is important, having

introduced the research area to say why this research is important and to what knowledge it will speak.

CONTRIBUTION TO EXISTING KNOWLEDGE

The research relates to 3 main bodies of sociological literature:

a) The sociological study of identity and the self: The thesis will be of use specifically in relation to the negotiation and 'doing' of identities. In Chapter 2 this theoretical framework in constructed and then this is explored in relation to the data throughout the thesis.

b) The sociological study of sexuality: The thesis produces findings that will contribute to how we understand sexuality in general and bisexuality specifically. This is explored in Chapter 2 in relation to the literature and then in relation to the data throughout the thesis but particularly in Chapter 5.

c) The sociological study of religion: The thesis explores contemporary Christianity, how it is done and what it means to be Christian in society today. The literature on this area is reviewed in section two of Chapter 3 and then explored in relation to the data throughout the thesis but in particular in Chapters 5 and 6.

The study of bisexual Christians has policy implications in relation to the Church. It could potentially highlight flaws (or indeed strengths) in the arguments put forward by the Church against bisexuality. By exploring the lives of bisexual Christians it is hoped that light will be shone upon how bisexual Christians actually understand and do their lives and theoretical preconceptions be replaced by empirical research. The research will stretch the horizons of how we think about sexuality. The study of bisexuality can build bridges between sexualities and help to produce a more detailed understanding of what sexuality is and how it works.

THESIS OUTLINE

Chapter Two will explore the literature on doing and negotiating identity. Here the focus is understanding how identity will be used in relation to the data collected. This is explored in relation to bisexual identity and definitions of bisexuality. There is also a consideration of heteronormativity in the form of monosexism and heterosexism, often considered the biggest difficulty of being bisexual in wider society.

Chapter Three explores the literature on Christian identity and sexuality. This chapter will capture the current research landscape in which this thesis resides and explore the literature on being Christian and non-heterosexual (and specifically bisexual).

Chapter Four considers the methodology employed throughout the research process. This involves understanding how the research was designed and then realised,

how data was collected and then analysed. The underlying research considerations are also considered, reflecting upon the role of the researcher, reflexivity and ethics.

Chapter Five is the first of the three data chapters. The chapter is explicitly concerned with the internalisation of sexuality and faith and explores the self-definitions that respondents constructed for their bisexuality and Christianity. Chapter Four explores what both a bisexual and Christian identity means for the respondents.

Chapter Six is the second of three data chapters and is concerned with how the respondents try to negotiate their religious and sexual identities and the re-conceptualisations and re-imaginings of both which take place to reconcile bisexual identity with Christian identity. The focus is still within the private sphere here but focussing upon complex internal negotiations that take place.

Chapter Seven is the final data chapter and moves the respondents into the public sphere by asking what happens to identity when specific societal forces come into play. This is explored through relationships, support networks and Church life to ask how these social factors impact upon the identities of the respondents.

Chapter Eight is the conclusions chapter and returns to the main research aims and themes- the negotiation and 'doing' of identity, understanding bisexuality and bisexual identity and understanding Christianity and Christian identity. The chapter concludes with some recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 2: DOING AND NEGOTIATING (BISEXUAL) IDENTITY

INTRODUCTION

This chapter focuses upon a review of the literature on identity negotiation and how identity is 'done', and then discusses this in relation to bisexuality and bisexual identity. It is an exploration of the literature concerning the overall sociological theme of the thesis: the negotiation of (bisexual) identity.

During the review of the literature I have found that there are numerous ways of understanding the concept of identity. I will focus upon three key ideas: Presentation, reflexivity and narration. These stances represent 'doing' and 'negotiating' identity and these themes will run throughout.

PRESENTING AND NEGOTIATING IDENTITY

A key thinker in terms of exploring how the self is presented is Erving Goffman (1971), particularly his work '*Presentation of the Self in Everyday Life*'. In his work Goffman explores how the self can be portrayed and the meaning ascribed to the way that we portray ourselves. Using the analogy of theatre and performance, Goffman attempts to explain how we 'do' our identity. Lawler (2009) argues however, that the term

'performance' is problematic as it implies that we can change character at will. Furthermore, Lawler points out that in using such language Goffman also implies that a performance can never truly be authentic and never truly be us (2009:105). However, as Hacking (2004) comments, Goffman sees these roles or characters as part of our 'selves' rather than masks:

> The roles become aspects of the person, some more owned, some more resented, but always an evolving side of what the person is. (Hacking 2004:290)

Therefore, although there are difficulties here with language, and I will discuss these difficulties throughout, the ideas put forward by Goffman are important in understanding how we might think about identity.

Goffman argues that through everyday activities and interactions with other people we create pictures and expectations of how we should behave. Although this is a two-way process in that we read others and they read us, to some extent Goffman believes that it is the individual who has the final say in presenting themselves. For Goffman the process is a game or a 'potentially infinite cycle of concealment, discovery, false revelation, and rediscovery' (Goffman 1971:20). Here the process becomes tactical as there is the suggestion that the individual can use measures to relate to others differently, or in fact hide their true selves. The potential parallels here with a study on bisexual Christian are clear. Bisexual Christians may need to tactically employ 'defensive tactics' (Goffman 1971:24) in order to avert the attention of those who are not accepting. If for example, they are in a bisexual space they may play down their Christian identity.

This can be developed further using what Goffman calls the 'front stage' and 'backstage' regions. He uses the metaphor of a restaurant here. The front stage refers to a public display of identity such as a waiter serving tables as opposed to the behaviour of the same waiter in the kitchen with his colleagues. The more private back region is where the individual controls what aspects of their identity they want to become public and those which should remain private. What Goffman suggests is that as people we are in a constant state of performance, yet the type of performance changes dependent on our situation, and this makes us who we are. As Lawler neatly summarises:

To be a person, then, is to perform being a person. Occasionally, especially in new situations, we might be conscious of this, but mostly we are not. (Lawler 2009:106)

By using a dramaturgical model with front and backstage regions in this way Goffman neatly describes how and why our identity is in a constant state of negotiation and re-negotiation. For him, this is entirely normal and healthy and is dependent on our lives and our interactions with others. As previously discussed, identity can mean that individuals are denied access or gain access to networks and groups because of their identity. For Goffman, the individual then must present themselves in a way that would either lead to them gaining access or being denied access. Goffman is not claiming that such tactical defence measures are necessarily conscious decisions; they are decisions which are informed by social rules and conditions. In other words Goffman (1977) argues that inevitably we are governed by societal order where we learn what acceptable behaviour is and then stick to it. Whether or not something is acceptable also relies on what he calls the 'frame' (Goffman 1974). The 'frame' refers to the setting in which the behaviour occurs

and is vital part of his ideas. It is the context and the situation in which the interaction takes place and informs the performance which takes place.

Goffman also considered normalisation and stigma and its replication throughout society. Due to his understanding of interaction Goffman sees that 'normality' itself creates stigma because people are aware of what is considered as normal within society. Therefore 'any male who fails to qualify in any of these ways is likely to view himself – during moments at least – as unworthy, incomplete and inferior' (Goffman 1968:153). This is important for this study because it allows the thesis to explore where bisexual Christians fit in as individuals who have been stigmatised. The practical techniques used by the respondents for example, may throw light upon Goffman's ideas.

Throughout this section I have highlighted Goffman's ideas as potentially rewarding for the study of bisexual Christians. The way that he understands interaction and the presentation of the self is an important part in understanding how my respondents did their identity. I feel that Goffman will be useful in exploring how bisexual Christians negotiate their identities in situations where they have to take part in extensive self-censuring and seeing identity as a presentation or performance is a good way of understanding how they actually 'do' their identities. For example, in what situations do most negotiations take place and why does such self-censuring take place in certain scenarios more than others.

However, there are potential areas which could be developed. Although as Lawler (2000) argues Goffman is key to understanding the rise in agency and freedom through interaction, I feel there are two main areas where the ideas have been better developed. Firstly, there is an increased awareness of the tension between structure and agency. This has been explored in relation to the work of Giddens and the reflexive project. Secondly,

the idea of narrating identity and the importance of telling stories in order to create identity. Although Goffman is concerned with performance it is also important to consider the alternative ways which identity is brought to life.

IDENTITY AND THE REFLEXIVE SELF

Giddens (1991) understands identity as being constructed through reflexivity. The reflexive self as a self understood by the individuals' own past or personal biography. It could be argued that for Giddens identity is a much more personal quest, informed by the reflexivity of oneself. It is clear that there is an awareness of society but this society is interpreted through the filter of the individual or agent (Giddens 1991:53). This in turn means that the self becomes an individual task or project which the individual must control and work out with the ultimate goal being the production of the ideal self. Although, the language seems rather selfish the goal then is to construct a self that an individual is happy with for themselves (Giddens 1991).

Such a perspective has evolved from what Giddens perceives as a change in the way that social structures work and the control that individuals have over their own lives. Giddens is concerned with the weakening of traditional structures such as the Church and family and a rise in other looser forms of structure. For Giddens (1991), priests are no longer the holders of power, they have been overtaken by knowledge specialists within academia and the media , echoing Foucault's argument from 1976. This has led to the individual having more control over their future life paths. No longer guided by the old traditions which were instilled at birth, in contemporary society the individual is free to consider all possibilities and to make their choice. Giddens argues that we have in fact 'no

choice but to choose' (Giddens 1991:81) and even if we choose to ignore something we are in fact making a conscious choice to do so.

The life that Giddens conjures is one of constant choice and anxiety about whether one is choosing the best thing. Yet choice is inevitable. For Giddens however, this does not lead to various conflicting selves, it leads to one stable self with numerous presented selves.

> Yet again it would not be correct to see contextual diversity as simply, and inevitably promoting the fragmentation of self, let alone its disintegration into multiple 'selves'... A person may make use of diversity in order to create a distinctive self-identity which positively incorporates elements from different settings into an integrated narrative. (Giddens 1991: 190)

This aspect of Giddens' work is important in relation to the study of individuals who identify as bisexual Christians. Giddens therefore can be used to explain how someone might for example, attend a Church which is strongly anti-bisexual whilst being an active member in bisexual support groups. Giddens (1991) separates self-identity from identity which is presented and internalised self identity, making it entirely possible to behave in one way but think in another. Rather than having different 'selves' the individual is left with different compartments or sectors of identity.

The dissolving of social structures as mentioned has had an effect of detraditionalisation, as the old models of life are weakened and new forms emerge. This has impacted upon relationships and intimacy with what Giddens calls 'pure relationships' (Giddens 1991), relationships which are exactly what you want them to be without

following traditional blueprints. Giddens' work on pure relationships has also impacted upon understanding of homosexual relationships. Coupled with an increasing acceptance of homosexuality, detraditionalisation has led to an increase in possible relationships (Giddens 1992). Giddens' theories, then, are highly useful in understanding how identity works. However, his argument does seem to rely heavily upon the assertion that we do have a greater propensity for individual agency. The unrelenting focus upon the individual as sole constructer of their own identity suggests that such an approach would give the individual the opportunity to construct their identity outside of the shackles of tradition and culture (Adams 2003:222). This places much more of an emphasis on the individual and less on over-arching structures of class and gender.

As I have discussed previously that because of issues such as detraditionalisation, choice and so forth Giddens argues that individuals have needed to look within themselves to discover their 'selves'. This is a much more agency driven project, where the individual acts outside of the constricting social structures, yet this seems to contradict to a good deal of previous work. For example, the ideas of G.H. Mead with the formulation of the 'I' and 'Me' concept. 'I' refers to some inner-core where the external processes are analysed and contemplated, and 'Me' which is your place within societal norms and culture (see Mead 1956: 199-249). Mead argues that the self is a direct product of social relations. In fact it is impossible to consider the 'I' without the 'Me' as we always consider the outcome of our actions before acting upon them. The self therefore is a product of society which is negotiated on society's (and the over-arching structures which could be defined as society) terms.

A sophisticated argument has been put forward by theorists such as Mestrovic (1998) and then developed by Adams (2003). Such arguments are concerned with Giddens' (in particular) use of culture and more specifically language.

…however 'responsible' the individual is for making sense of their experience, they still rely on common cultural forms- language being the most basic- however much they have altered over history. (Adams 2003:299)

The critique here is that we use language to communicate and interact and this language is a product of culture and society. Therefore in using language we are bound to society and its rules. All language is culturally situated and only has meaning when taken in the correct context. Indeed even within Western sociological thought there is disagreement as to the precise nature of reflexivity itself. Adkins for example understands reflexivity as an ambivalent process, incorporated into the everyday reproduction of social structures rather than transcending them (see Adkins 2002).

Another important argument, which I previously touched upon can be extracted using Bourdieus' concept of Habitus. Habitus refers to our place within the world and how we relate and behave, although these things seem 'natural' they are learnt during early socialisation (see Adams 1999, Sweetman 2003). Therefore the argument would be that in being reflexive individuals are simply acting as society wants them to act. Subtle socialisation and conditioning has occurred which individuals are mostly unaware of. In making choices which we are living in 'forced reflexivity' and are simply choosing what society has offered us.

The major flaw that lies with this approach however is the failure to explain how individuals 'do' identities which are conflicting if one of the identities relies upon social structures such as the Church. Bauman (2000) consistently argues for example, that if one identity fits better than we can simply discard the old one and 'upgrade' to the new. This

approach does not explain what happens when people want to live with two identities that may conflict if one is rooted in a social structure. I therefore propose that I see identity much more as a process which is two-way, and not focussed too heavily on individual agency. As Elliot suggests:

> As directors of our own self-narratives, we draw upon psychic frames of memory and desire, as well as the wider cultural and social resources, in fashioning the self. Such self-constitution is not only something which happens through our own actions. It is also something that happens to us, through the design of other people, the impact of cultural conventions and social practices, and the force of social processes and political institutions. (Elliott 2001: 2)

Symbolic interaction and the work of theorists such as Plummer (1975), Jenkins (2000) and Mead (1956) have placed emphasis on the interaction with society and how this creates meaning. I intend to adopt this approach for the research project and this will be developed further in the following section where the focus moves on to how identity is done and how it is negotiated.

It is clear from this section that identity is an important sociological theme. Having situated the research project within this broad area the chapter now moves to explore how this literature speaks to the research project and how it is informed by the literature. The project is an exploration of identity management and negotiation, and therefore the chapter moves to explore the literature on this specific aspect of identity.

NARRATING IDENTITY

A useful approach is highlighted in Lawler's recent book '*Identity*' where she discusses the role of the narrative in identity construction. Lawler argues that in reality identities are constructed through the life-narratives that we tell each other, and ourselves, about our lives (Lawler 2009:11). The stories that we tell are not only capturing an essence of who we are as people but they are an example of the way that people package ideas and experiences in order to make sense of their own lives, and consequently their own identity. As Lawler argues:

> ...from a narrative perspective the relationship between identity and autobiography is not that the autobiography (the telling of a life) *reflects* a pre-given identity: rather, identities are *produced* through the autobiographical work in which all of us engage every day, even though few of us will formally write an 'autobiograpy'. (Lawler 2009:13)

This perspective is inspired by Plummer, and in particular his work '*Telling Sexual Stories*' (1995). Plummer argues that in order to understand identity we must listen to the stories people tell and the relationship between the person telling and the person listening. For Plummer we invent our identities by telling stories and in the act of telling these stories we are able to make sense of our lives and others (Plummer 1995). These stories are always therefore social stories and highlight the closeness between the self and society. To return to Lawler's quotation here, stories are told in relation to previous stories and identities are produced by our engagement with our own autobiography and self-awareness every day.

Due to the fact that these stories are social Plummer encourages the consideration

of the culture of the story, the historical setting, the context and the social setting (Plummer 2001:43). Therefore it is the meanings of the stories that change not the actual stories, due to what Plummer calls a 'ceaselessly changing stream of historically grounded interactions between producers and readers in shifting *contexts'* (ibid. Italics in original). However, not all stories are told or can be told. Plummer (1995) uses the example of the coming out story to suggest that there are times when stories are changed or altered because of their nature. Stories are socially contained and restricted depending upon their content and the person telling the story and the person listening to the story. As with Goffman, 'narrating identity' offers identity as fluid and in a state of flux but also allows for a degree of stability. Unlike the work of many postmodern theorists (such as Bauman 2000, as discussed previously), the telling of identity stories allows us to explore conflicts in identity and diverse identities. This is vital for the study of bisexual Christians whose two main identities are often seen as being in conflict or even contradictory.

However, Plummer's approach is not without potential flaws either. It is clear that it is useful to understand the self as a narrative constructed in relation to scripts and our contexts but as Layder (2004) argues the approach relies heavily upon the authenticity of self-knowledge and the human ability to create a fictional self by describing what one wants to be rather than want one actually is. As Layder puts it:

...we must not confuse what we believe about ourselves, or what we would like to think about ourselves, with who or what we actually are, in the real circumstances of our lives. (2004:127)

Therefore, although telling stories allows us to make sense of our 'selves' and our lives, it is possible to imagine such scripts inaccurately and without regard for our external lives. Therefore, it is important that society is not omitted from the equation. Therefore to quote Layder at length:

> To focus on how individuals think about themselves and their unfolding lives is to be in danger of always accepting an idealized and essentially fictive version of self-narrative. Such a view cedes far too much credence to an individual's capactity for (accurate) self-knowledge and underplays the human tendency towards self-deception and idealization. Also while it is also that we are in *part* responsible for constructing our own lives (our narrative storylines) it is not true that our volition and agency operate in the absence of social constraints imposed by the real circumstances or our lives and experiences. (ibid)

This seems a more rounded explanation of the self as narrative. It also seems more human and more sensitive in its approach. For example, there is a focus upon the emotions and life problems which we face, the irrationality of our choices and how these are negotiated to create our identity. Therefore we see the self as 'constantly created and recreated as a result both of the individual's own responses and the influence and impact of their life experiences, existential problems and so on' (Layder 2004:126). To see the self entirely as revisable or reflexive is inaccurate. For example, a self which is constantly changing and re-inventing itself is ignoring the life experiences that have occurred, and therefore is inaccurate, or even as Layder suggest (2004:128) 'unhealthy' as it blocks out key events which need addressing. To see the self as reflexive then is to recognise that it is

reflexive up to a point but that society and external forces affect just how reflexive it can be.

In this respect identity is negotiated and done is relation to several key internal and external dimensions (such as emotional life, control mechanisms) and the awareness of the self within society and the 'interaction between a person's agency...and the life experiences and social circumstances which shape and influence the trajectory of the self' (Layder 2004:155).

Narrating identity then is about a journey which is individual but which realises there are structures which are in society which are often not subject to personal agency. This agency has become more acute because of the connections with history and personal biography. This is different to the work of Giddens (1995) that focuses upon the loosening of traditional social ties and the diminishing of the power of social structures.

Narrating identity can be used to understand how bisexuals Christians understand their own identity. As individuals who may face prejudice and marginalisation due to both their sexuality and their religious faith, collecting their sexual stories and exploring how they construct their identity in relation to these stories can be very powerful. It can highlight the negotiations which take place and the thought processes behind why such negotiations take place. Furthermore, narrating identity shows the negotiation between internal thought processes and the enactment of identity.

Taking these ideas forward the thesis now moves explore the two identities which are the focus of the thesis: bisexuality and Christianity. Having explored the theoretical framework of the project the aim here is to explain what we mean when talking about bisexuality and the current research landscape in which the literature resides.

DEFINING AND UNDERSTANDING BISEXUALITY

Having reviewed the theoretical and empirical literature on identity and its negotiation and 'doing', the chapter moves to focus upon bisexual identity. The review will explore the theme of bisexuality and what has been written with regard to what bisexuality is and what it means to individuals who identify as bisexual. Using this as the starting point the chapter moves to explore the social aspects of bisexuality such as relationships and the use of support networks.

It is important to understand what identifying as bisexual means and what a bisexual identity is because we need to see what happens to such an identity when a Christian identity is added to it. Therefore an understanding of what bisexuality is about is important.

As will be discussed, the area of bisexuality and spirituality is under-researched and the project will stretch the boundaries of sociological thought with regards to identity (sexual and spiritual) and the relationship between faith and bisexuality. The research will produce data which informs empirical, theoretical and policy debates on bisexuality and Christianity in particular. In a more general manner it will produce data useful in debate on human sexuality.

The aim of this section is to present a picture of the literature on bisexuality and explore the common trends in both theoretical and empirical work. The chapter begins with an exploration of the literature with regards to understanding and defining bisexuality. Here the aim is to look how bisexuality has been presented in the literature and to look at what bisexuality means. It would not be unfair to say that the literature still tends to focus

upon the question 'what is bisexuality' and therefore detailed attention will be given to this question. The section takes this literature and poses the question why is bisexuality different from homosexuality and heterosexuality? I posit that there are 3 challenges which are levelled at monosexuality (the attraction to members of one specific sex) through bisexuality: Gender and its role, the idea of monosexuality itself and the issue of polyamory. Here I will show through the literature that bisexuality is unique and deserves individual consideration. The chapter then takes a more macro approach, moving the examination of bisexuality to a more public sphere. Here I look at the literature on what it means to identify as a bisexual, moving the question away from more internal investigation. The final sub-section of the chapter looks at the role of politics in understanding bisexuality. The potentially radical nature of bisexuality means that it could potentially question our understanding of sex, sexuality and gender and therefore it has become politicised. It is vital to get an understanding of what bisexuality is and what it means to identify as bisexual because the research project is an exploration of what happens to this identity when it is combined with a Christian identity. What are the complex identity management strategies and techniques which must be employed?

It is often stated that bisexuality is under-researched. Rust for example (2000) makes the statement that bisexuality is traditionally ignored by academia (Rust 2000). It is often the case that bisexuality is omitted from books dealing with sexuality, as Eadie points out, Plummer's (1992) influential book 'Modern Homosexualities' does not contain a single indexed mention of bisexuality (Eadie 1993:123). Contemporary literature is much more inclusive. Ron Fox the American scholar and activist recently (in 2007) donated 3,000 articles and 300 books to the Homodok library in Amsterdam, making it the largest single resource for bisexuality in the world (Fox 2007). The library now houses an estimated 4,000 pieces on bisexuality, although it is unclear whether these pieces are social scientific

in content or combined with non-academic work. In 2000 the library merged with the Lesbian Archives Amsterdam to create IHLIA (International Homo/Lesbian Information Centre and Archives) (see http://www.ihlia.nl). Fox himself argues that in terms of academia we are currently at a point of prosperity (Fox 2000). I hope to use this growing body of literature to look at what bisexuality is and what it means to possess a bisexual identity.

> What bisexuality is remains unclear, and its definition varies from person to person (George 1993:103).

This quotation from Sue George is from her 1993 book published using her own empirical research. It is seen as the first UK-based empirical academic work on bisexuality and highlights the complexity of the concept of bisexuality. George (1993) argues that bisexuality as a concept is so individual and personal that its very meaning is unclear. This remains a common theme throughout the literature. Hemmings states for example that bisexuality is too diverse to define (Hemmings 1993:124). Yet definitions exist and it seems an easy way out to simply argue that bisexuality is too complicated to at least grapple with. The accusation appears to be that bisexuality is too individualised and personal to categorise but theorists have done so, and in doing so have shone light upon bigger ideas such as sexuality itself.

Bisexuality is often commonly understood as attraction for both men and women. Indeed the Oxford English Dictionary defines the word bisexual as simply meaning an attraction to members of both sexes (Oxford English Dictionary 2010). This definition would seem sound but through closer examination it is a rather simplistic generalisation.

Who we are as sexual beings is complicated and varied and seems to be more than to whom one is attracted on a physical level.

Storr (1997) has suggested that empirical research highlights three main ways of understanding bisexuality. Firstly, as a combination of maleness and femaleness. Here the bisexual individual is constructed as a mixture of male and female physical and mental characteristics, resulting in a person who today would be categorised as androgynous. Secondly as a combination of masculinity and femininity. In this scenario the focus is upon societal constructs of what it means to be masculine or feminine and the characteristics and actions which are defined as being masculine and feminine. Bisexuality sits in this middle of these two and becomes an even amalgamation of them. Thirdly, a combination of heterosexuality and homosexuality. Here bisexuality sits in between heterosexuality and homosexuality and is in some way a combination of both sexualities. This also demonstrates the inextricable linking of gender and sexuality. There is the suggestion that bisexuality highlights the fact that gender and sexuality are inseparable. Taking the lead from Kinsey (1948) bisexuality is seen as being anything which isn't completely heterosexual or homosexual. As this third idea is the most prevalent in the contemporary literature it is the one I will pay most attention to. If we focus too squarely upon seeing bisexuality as a biological concept or as a combination of masculinity and femininity then we are not considering contemporary bisexuality which exists within society today. However, this is not to dismiss the first two ideas, which as will become apparent, are also important.

This broad historical and theoretical framework set up by Storr appears, according to the literature to be an accurate summary of the different schools of thought with regards to bisexuality, and I have developed Storr's work here to produce an over-arching framework for the history of research into bisexuality. Such an approach is supported

throughout the literature. Hemmings (1993:126), for example sees that there are three possible definitions or understandings of bisexuality:

1- Darwinist biological natural- an organism with male and female aspects.

2- Presence of masculine and feminine characteristics, usually in equal measures meaning that the individual in androgynous in many respects.

3- People who are emotionally and physically attracted to members of both sexes.

There are clearly parallels here with Storr's ideas. Point 1 refers to individuals who are in some way androgynous or are biologically male and female. Point 2, as with Storr suggests that there was a shift towards understanding bisexuals as possessing a more even balance of masculine and feminine traits and point 3 situates bisexuals somewhere on the scale of heterosexuality and homosexuality and not being one or the other.

Such 'waves' or 'trends' in research into bisexuality are not mutually exclusive however and there are clear overlaps. For example, Weeks (1991:75) argues that for Freud the struggle between the masculine and the feminine is a naturally occurring battle which for men would result in masculinity being the victor and femininity for women. Therefore bisexuals are seen to be in a state of arrested development where one side has not become more dominant than the other. It could be surmised that bisexuality in this case is seen as

an infantile form of sexuality, or an undeveloped sexual identity. Freud therefore saw bisexuality as a measurement tool or a theoretical device in order to test whether his patients had progressed correctly. Fox has pointed out that this use of bisexuality as a theoretical construct is widespread and has been used to measure aspects of 'evolutionary theory, psychosexual development, psychoanthropology, masculinity and femininity and homosexuality' (Fox 1996:3).This shows however, that the first and the second waves have overlaps. Being male was seen as being naturally masculine and not up for contestation, making any distinction between the two difficult. As most of the researchers during this time essentialised gender as an in-built quality, the separation of the two was not considered.

The categorisation of the history of bisexual research into three waves does not take into consideration the nuance of the work carried out by key researchers and scientists at the time. The work of Ellis (1975) for example is easily categorised as being the first wave as he looks for real tangible differences between homosexual men and heterosexual men on grounds of physical appearance, behaviour and preferences. To use but one example, in the findings of his research he comments that homosexual men have a fondness for the colour green, but that this is unsurprising because this is a feminine colour and also preferred by women. For Ellis social constructs such as masculinity are so essentialised that he sees them as innate and inseparable from a person's biological sex. I find the distinction between the two waves rather limiting and although there are distinct differences between the researchers during the eras it is a rather false delineation between two overlapping periods of research.

Although I have suggested that these first two waves of sexual research are out-dated and social constructionism seems to have downplayed and overtaken these more essentialist notions, they are still evident in popular culture today with the stereotyping of

homosexual men. In terms of research into bisexuality Charlotte Wolff (1979) argues that bisexuality in linked to androgyny using her own life experiences as the basis for her research. Her work suggests that bisexuality is a middle ground between both masculinity and femininity and biological sex.

The third major wave of research which is still in operation today concerns the position of bisexuality in relation heterosexuality and homosexuality, and its position within the so-called binary model of human sexuality[1]. As Storr (1999:4) argues there are two further contentious questions at its core which make the debate so lively. Firstly, is bisexuality a combination of homosexuality and heterosexuality? Secondly, is bisexuality a distinct third sexuality? If bisexuality is a combination sexuality we only need to look at the identities of heterosexuals and homosexuals to understand how bisexuality works and what it is. In other words bisexuality is seen as a type of dual-sexuality combining both homosexual and heterosexual desire then bisexuality, it could argued, would be the ability to switch between the two at will. The roots of such ideas are embedded in the work of Alfred Kinsey. His research, which reached its apex with the publication of 'Sexual Behaviour in the Human Male' in 1948, was ground breaking in its scope and radical potential. In terms of bisexuality Kinsey's work suggests that it is likely that a large proportion of the population is to some degree bisexual. To clarify, using questioning Kinsey scored individuals' sexuality as either exclusively heterosexual (0 on the scale) or exclusively homosexual (6 on the scale). Kinsey found that in fact most people were somewhere in the middle (Kinsey 1948).

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[1] The Binary model of human sexuality is a term frequently used by bisexual and queer scholars to denote the popular conception of human sexuality in contemporary Western society. Rust (2000) argues that seeing sexuality in terms of binarism e.g. either homosexual and heterosexual with no middle ground shows bisexuality as a transitional stage. This also links with binarism in terms of gender which theorists such as Stein and Plummer (1994) have argued against as it creates marginalisation. Understanding sexuality in these binary terms however is common place in popular culture.

This has some far reaching implications. Distinct identities such as homosexuality and bisexuality are not beneficial or indeed possible as there is no such thing as pure homosexuality/heterosexuality. Kinsey's ideas in this respect are of course, potentially radical but also potentially damaging, or even counter-productive. This is because it could be argued therefore that in terms of bisexuality and identity Kinsey did not advocate the view that bisexuality was a distinct third sexuality rather that it was any position on his scale that was not a pure 0 or 6. Using Kinsey to explore identity is problematic but his research questions why we need to distinguish between such things as homosexuality and heterosexuality.

Researchers who generally fall into this sexologist category did occasionally recognise bisexuality as a distinct sexuality and it would be unfair to generalise all the work in this field as following Kinsey. The work of theorists Feldman and McCulloch (1971) and in particular McDonald (1981) began a 'categorization' trend in research, where the purpose of the research seems to be to group individuals with similar ideas and experiences and assign a sexual identity to them. Using large questionnaires the researchers asked about sexual actions, feelings, fantasies and histories and then decided whether the answers given indicated the respondents' sexuality. McDonald (1981) saw bisexuality as a combination of both heterosexuality and homosexuality but distinct from the two. Therefore an individual is bisexual if they are neither completely heterosexual nor completely homosexual, more a mix of the two, which makes it different. Seeing bisexuality as a 'real' sexuality is a relatively modern phenomenon, but seeing it as a 'behaviour' is not. I will consider this closely in the section on bisexual identity, but it is clear that not everyone who behaves 'bisexually' identifies as bisexual. Rust (1996a) has written extensively on this and her empirical research shows that women (her sample was entirely women) often engage in sexual

activity with both men and women during their lifetime but in general continue to identify as heterosexual or homosexual.

The interpretation of bisexuality as a distinct sexuality would seem to be the logical end point, or more precisely the point at which we have currently settled. If then we decide that bisexuality is a different form of sexuality, what then is bisexuality? As previously suggested the term 'attraction' in definitions is often problematic and therefore I will suggest that a more apt definition is someone who is emotionally, physically and spiritually attracted to members of either sex (it is also likely that they be other more individualised forms of attraction such as an attraction to certain characteristics such as sense of humour, but these are the most clear) and this is echoed throughout the literature:

> People who experience the desire of emotional, sensual and/or sexual relations with people of both sexes, though not necessarily at the same time (Off Pink Collective 1988:90).

Although dating from 1988 this definition is still most common. However, it does not take into consideration the role that society plays in shaping sexuality, and there are variations on this argument it would seem. A more social constructionist idea is put forward by Eadie for example who sees bisexuality as '...one way amongst many of learning what is and what is not erotic, what such feelings mean, and the culturally sanctioned forms in which they may be expressed' (Eadie 1997:8). Bisexuality in this instance is seen simply as another way that sexuality is learnt. This definition seems broad yet seems a good starting point as it has been explored, particularly through the work of Paula Rust. Rust (2004:216) argues that in reality most bisexuals view their sexuality as the 'capacity' to be

attracted to members of both sexes. This therefore does not rely on experiences or personal sexual history. Further to this 'sexual attraction to, or romantic feelings toward, another person does not necessarily imply that one would enjoy having sex with that person...' (Rust 2004:217). Therefore such a definition would have to encapsulate the fact that a sexual relationship could occur.

Yet such a definition does not seem to address the issues that have become relevant today namely: the oppression bisexuals suffer living in a monosexist society (Eadie 1997), the radical potential of bisexuality (Rust 2000, Garber 2000) or that fact that seeing bisexuality it terms of heterosexuality or homosexuality makes it invisible and powerless (as Garber would clearly argue). If bisexuality is too diverse to label as an attraction to members of either sex and the social constructionist perspective outlined by Eadie does nothing to address the injustices visited upon bisexual individuals, how have scholars attempted to understand bisexuality?

The focus has been upon finding commonalities that bisexuals share, in order to not be exclusionary. Two responses to this standpoint seem to exist within the literature, as several scholars have attempted to move beyond such an approach. Firstly, the idea that bisexuality is a rejection of gendered attraction in that the sex of a person is not a major consideration in relationship/sexual formation. Secondly, there is the outright refusal to define bisexuality. There are many strands and theories which branch of from this theory which range from conservative to radical in their nature.

Although important research has supported the claim that in regard to sexuality masculinity and femininity are of no importance, my previous research has suggested that it is unwise to dismiss the issue of gender when exploring bisexuality (see Toft 2002, 2004). Gender is something that is negotiated and worked on. For some bisexuals the fact that

they are not attracted to a particular sex or gender is an important part of their sexuality. Conversely, gendered traits are often the basis for sexual attraction which informs sexuality. The work of Clausen (1990) in particular has addressed this when she talks of her relationship with her male partner. She argues that she loves her male partner because of who he is and she fell for him rather than for what he is in terms of biology. She clearly sees her relationship in terms of a connection with the individual rather than what they look or act like. This pushes the idea of bisexuality into the realms of being 'something else' which differentiates itself from a statement about sexual behaviour, activity, history, feelings and so on. It turns bisexuality into a questioning force which has the potential to challenge the way we view sexuality and attraction. As Rust (2000) states, using this logic it is possible to see bisexuality as a missing link between heterosexuality and homosexuality which can bring the two together and enable them to learn from each other. The major challenge, which will be the focus of the next section is the challenge that bisexuality poses towards sexual attraction. The idea here is that bisexuals side-step the conventional sexual attraction opens up the possibility that bisexuality is challenging the whole idea of sexual attraction, perhaps the categories of attraction are flexible and malleable and do not matter as much to bisexuals.

A recent trend has been to offer no definition of bisexuality. The logic of this is put forward by Rust in her 2004 article 'Two Many and Not Enough...' which brilliantly and systemically discusses the possible connotations of what a bisexual identity is. She argues that in defining bisexuality we will simply not be able to include everyone currently holding onto an identity of 'bisexual'. The bisexual community is too diverse to tie down without resulting in sexual oppression (Rust 2004).It may be exclusionary to offer strict definitions of bisexuality. Also, it may not be possible to know all the connotations of bisexuality and

in defining bisexuality the author is projecting their own biases and prejudices upon the definition.

It would seem that bisexuality is difficult to grasp and resistant to strict categorisation, but generally using Eadie (1997) it is a socially constructed sexuality which relates to the attraction of both sexes. This attraction can take the form of gender- an attraction to individuals who look and act a certain way or it can be a vehement rejection of this sort of attraction using such phrases as 'loving the person' (see the example put forward by Clausen 1990). In this case the attraction lies in different areas which are often non-visual and traditionally not seen as being as important. Wilby (2010) recently argued that she is attracted to people who are punctual and made the case that for non-heterosexual women the focus upon these other categories of attraction is much more widespread in the gay community. This is supported by Swami (2009) who argues that non-heterosexual people do show more diversity in how they are attracted to other people, not just in terms of visual attraction but also personality traits/characteristics and aspects of who they are as people. It would seem that in terms of bisexual people this diversity is more exaggerated with some scholars argue that this is one of the defining characteristics of bisexuality (Garber 2000).

Alongside these are issues such as monogamy and relationship make up, are there any set patterns which bisexuals individuals adopt? It has been suggested, particularly by Klesse (2009) and Anderlini-D'Onofrio (2004) that it is common for bisexual people to be involved in relationships with more than one person at a time and with more than one sex at a time. The recurring question seems to be can bisexuals live happily with only one partner or do they need what both sexes provide? The current literature remains divided in its opinion. However, it would seem that it is incorrect to assume that a bisexual person must have partners of both sexes in order to be bisexual. Although some people clearly do,

it does not seem to be a qualifying attribute for bisexuality and it is therefore not that case that to be bisexual you must have a partner of either sex. Polyamory itself is a challenging concept and will be explored in the following section where the focus shifts to exploring why bisexuality appears to be difficult thing for people to understand.

THE CHALLENGES OF BISEXUALITY: HETERO-NORMATIVITY AND UNDERSTANDING ATTRACTION

Having explored the literature with regard to explicit definitions and meanings attached to bisexuality, it is important to look at bisexuality within the context of the research project itself. What is it about bisexuality that makes it different from heterosexuality and homosexuality and why is it potentially problematic for the Church? The focus of this section is to move away from the literature on definition towards the nuances of bisexuality that make it distinct and challenging to some preconceptions about sexuality. This section moves away from internalised, personal definitions of bisexuality towards exploring bisexuality in relation to wider society, moving away from the micro level of analysis towards the macro. From the literature I have identified three main areas of investigation in relation to these questions. These areas are all underpinned by what Warner (1991) labelled 'heteronormativity' which suggests that society normalises (often through institutions such as the Church) heterosexuality, pushing other forms of sexuality into the realms of unacceptability or even unnaturalness. The issue of gender and the questions that bisexuality asks about gender, particularly in relation to masculine and

feminine roles and how we understand gender in relation to physical attraction. Secondly, the role of heteronormativity, explored through monosexuality and monogamy/polyamory. Exploring the prevalence of monosexuality throughout society and the problems reconciling this with bisexuality. Not to be confused with monogamy, monosexuality refers to a romantic involvement with members of one sex. It has been suggested that monosexism is the greatest challenge that bisexuals face in having their sexuality accepted (Eadie 1993). Indeed, in a society built upon understanding heterosexuality and attraction to the other sex and homosexuality as the attraction to the same sex, bisexuality resides in a sphere which could be potentially difficult to grasp as it refers to the attraction towards both.

Finally, the issue of monogamy will be explored. Monogamy refers to the romantic involvement with one person only no matter what their sex is. However, more pertinently in relation to bisexuality is the idea of polyamory which further problematises bisexuality in relation to other sexualities and also to organised Christianity.

Gender and Monosexuality

On a very basic level bisexuality challenges traditional gender roles because it seems to undermine the idea that relationships involve a member of each sex. However, this dynamic is also present in the lives of gay men and lesbians. Where bisexuality is different is that the sex of the people involved in the relationship is interchangeable, furthermore the gender make-up of the people involved may (or may not) be different. The role of gender in the lives of bisexuals seems to further the idea that gender is a process of negotiation rather than something which is taken as being biological or prescribed by society.

Bisexuality seems to stretch the boundaries of gender even further because the sex and gender of the parties involved is interchangeable. Bisexuality seems to suggest that gender and the sex of a person is not the primary criteria for selecting a partner. This has been the focus of a great deal of research, particularly in the USA (MacDonald 1981, Ross & Paul 1992; Rust, 1992, 1993; Weise 1992; Zinik, 1985).

The issue of gender and monosexuality will be developed with regard to other aspects throughout this review. However, the literature suggests that gender is a complex issue with regard to bisexuality because of the unique position which bisexuality takes.

Monogamy and Polyamory

It would also seem from the literature that writers who reject the binary approach towards sexuality do so on the grounds that all such work is entrenched in a world dominated by monosexism. Eadie argues that the biggest challenge facing bisexuals is working against monosexuality (see Eadie 1997). However, this has been heightened by simultaneously practising non-monosexuality and non-monogamy through polyamorous relationships. Although research seems to suggest that bisexuals are more likely to be polyamorous (Klesse 2009), it is not logical to then decide that all bisexuals are polyamorous, and this is backed up by a vast body of empirical research (see Ochs 2009 for a multitude of accounts from monogamous bisexuals). Furthermore, the claim that bisexuals must be polyamorous is considered one of the most common anti-bisexual stereotypes (Udis-Kessler 1996).

Polyamorous relationships do not have to be bisexual of course. Yet if there were they would clearly provide insights to the above and also into the nature of gendered

attraction. A logical argument regarding such a situation would be that because such open polyamorous relationships show little or no concern regarding the sex of their partners or indeed there socially constructed gender identity, that everyone has such potential. Or if they did not then there is some pathological reason why monogamous people don't and polyamorous people do. Aside from this however, is the over-arching suggestion that such relationships can break apart our traditional understanding of sexuality, gender and relationships. I think it would not be a misrepresentation of the literature to state that the major goal of activism and academia in the field of polyamory studies is to promote such an claim (Cook 2005, Haritaworn et al 2006, Noel 2006).

In terms of identity it is clear that those who practice non-monogamy reject such rigid and static identities. This however, is not necessarily a conscious choice. I quote at length here from Sik Ying Ho's research on non-monogamy in Hong Kong as it fits with this argument excellently:

> People with multiple sex partners refuse to be imprisoned in one social space or one fixed sexual identity. They shuffle in between the boundaries of the charmed circle and the outer limits. In all the cases detailed in this article, very few would want to identify themselves as polyamorous or non-monogamous. For most of them, having multiple relationships was just something they did; there was no need to assume a totalized identity as someone with an alternative lifestyle. (Ho 2006:560)

These findings would suggest that people who engage in polyamorous relationships are not doing so to be part of a community or for any possible political implications, they do so for personal reasons such as: personal growth, improved honesty,

improving practice of safer sex, improved choice of partner and fun (Cook 2005:54-59). Only a small percentage of Cook's study noted that they do it 'because they like tweaking the noses of the societal structure that hurt them when they were kids…' (Cook 2005:59).

The idea of polyamory raises three main issues in relation to bisexuality. Firstly, there is the suggestion that being polyamorous and bisexual could be seen as being 'fully' bisexual. 'Fully' in this context refers to those in relationships with members of both sexes simultaneously and therefore are being seen as acting bisexually at all times. Therefore, if a bisexual individual is in a polyamorous relationship with members of various sexes then they are fulfilling the stereotype that bisexuals need all sexes all of the time (see Rust 1996:144), and are fulfilling the literal interpretation of bisexuality. This becomes complicated in terms of the relationship between sexual behaviour and identity. The identity that an individual may adopt may not be interpreted in the same fashion as others. Bisexual identity is often not interpreted as sexual relationships with members of both sexes simultaneously (Toft 2005). This also relates to problematic difficulties in defining bisexuality and the revolutionary nature of bisexuality. Bisexuals are not half gay, half straight and therefore do not need both women and men concurrently. (Rust 1996:128). The work of both Klesse (2009) and D'Onofrio (2009) suggests that it may be easier to maintain a bisexual identity whilst being polyamorous for this reason. This therefore also has ramifications for bisexuals who are not polyamorous (monogamous bisexuals). Klesse (2009) has suggested that it is potentially more difficult to maintain sexual identity for monogamous bisexuals because they are not 'being' bisexual all of the time.

Secondly, due to the fluid nature of polyamory the need for specific sexual identities is somewhat diminished. Followed through to a logical conclusion this would suggest that along with the eradication of sexual boundaries there are no boundaries within gender. This contradicts previous research which has found that the sex of a partner is

indeed carefully decided (Toft 2005), and severely underplays the work of feminists (particularly lesbian feminists). It also downplays the power of sexual identity which has so clearly helped lesbians and gay men from the 1970s to present day (Weeks 1996, Jeffreys 1999, Wilkinson 1996).

Finally, polyamory seems to further state the revolutionary potential of bisexuality which I previously discussed in relation to the work of Rust (1996a, 2000). Polyamory further stretches the binary system of human sexuality and gender that underpins everyday life and it does this because neither sex and gender seem to be the basis of relationships (or attraction). However, I do not think that polyamory is as challenging as sequential or monogamous bisexuals because of the very quandary that Klesse (2009) poses. Polyamorous bisexuals seem to confirm the fact that bisexual individuals need what you get from both men and women simultaneously, they need a mix of genders and sexes to confirm and maintain their sexuality. Monogamous bisexuals however, do not follow this logic as there seems to a consideration of gender and sex in terms of their attraction to other people. However, one of the most important factors in this may not be related to attraction or relationship formation at all.

THE POLITICISATION OF BISEXUALITY

...bisexuality is so diverse and fluid in its practice that it can be seen to present the ideal postmodern practice. (Jeffreys 1999:279)

This quotation from Jeffreys succinctly highlights a key bisexual quandary which will be the focus of this sub-section. Does bisexuality have a political goal and how does

this relate to other non-heterosexual activism? In this section I will address the literature on bisexual politics, in particular the important debate that exists between bisexual activists and lesbian feminists. The aim of this section is to explore bisexuality in the light of society, moving the exploration further away from the micro level which at the analysis began.

The most interesting and vocal arguments have come from the lesbian feminist communities who potentially have a great deal to lose from bisexual politics, as bisexuality is seen to downplay the importance of gender difference. Yet bisexual activists have been quick to point out that any hostility towards bisexual politics may have deep-seated reasons, as Eadie (1996:17) discusses:

It is clear enough that much lesbian and gay biphobia is a panicky enactment of their rejection of their own heterosexual desires.

Here Eadie is stating that the reaction from homosexuals is to do with the fact that they have repressed their heterosexuality. They are, if pushed further, afraid of their potential to be heterosexual (Jeffreys 1999:279). It is true that bisexuals face a good deal of biphobia, particularly from lesbians (Toft 2003, Rust 1993), but when bisexuality questions everything lesbians have strived for then perhaps such biphobia is partially justified.

Lesbian feminists have argued that the switch of focus from gender and gender differences towards a freer gender structure has depoliticised lesbianism and women in general. This ties in with the fact the bisexuality has been made 'chic'. Wilkinson's excellent article '*Bisexuality a La Mode*' makes the important link between bisexuality and essentialism.

Bisexuality, it is argued, simply reinforces the binarism of sexual identity which has the potential to dissolve:

If a lesbian having heterosex is 'transgressive', there must be some basic, underlying sexual identity that can be transgressed. (Wilkinson 1996:294)

Garber (2000:70) however would argue that the flexibility of bisexuality has begun to dissolve the binary structure of human sexuality:

It is an identity that is not an identity, a sign of the certainty of ambiguity, the stability of instability, a category that defines and defeats categorization.

Yet in fact 'new' bisexuality as Wilkinson argues could in fact just be reaffirming these identities in that it is seen as something fashionable to do because it seems to sit out of the boundaries of gendered society.

To some theorists bisexuality itself has become an anti-identity. Jan Clausen, the important feminist writer shocked the lesbian community by having sexual relations with a man (Clausen 1990). Her arguments corroborate Wilkinson's. For a lesbian, sex with men is dangerous, perverse, exciting. Rust's 1992 important study found that only 1/3 of lesbians are exclusively attracted to women (Rust 1992) and that 91% of lesbians had had heterosexual relationships since coming out. This furthers the idea that although behaviour may be bisexual, identity is not bisexual (Adam & Sears, 1996; Boulton & Fitzpatrick, 1993; Laumann, Gagnon, Michael, & Michaels, 1994). Although there may be numerous reasons

for having heterosex it cannot be denied that lesbians are having sex with men. Wilkinson's (1996) argument is that this is because of 'new' bisexuality, a bisexuality which one can engage in without losing ones sexual identity. Sex in this context has become entertainment, a 'sport-fuck', a bit of 'sexual healing'. Therefore to continue with Clausen's line of reasoning, there is no such thing as a bisexual identity because it is simply an add-on to your existing sexuality.

The literature suggests that the main reason lesbian feminists have been so scathing towards bisexuals and the idea of bisexuality is because of the way that bisexuals have handled sex and the politics behind this. The lesbian movement was united by the one commonality that they did not sleep with men (Stone 1996). Yet bisexuals freely chose to have sex with men. In fact it has been argued that bisexuals are the only true form of heterosexuals because unlike heterosexual women to whom it just comes naturally, they choose to sleep with men (see Stone 1996). This marketing plan to depoliticise sex (it must be stated that this may not be the fault of all bisexual activists) has given lesbians and also heterosexual women less political power because of the reliance on men (Wilkinson 1996:294-295). For many lesbian feminists at the end of the day 'bisexual women retain the option of running to men when the going gets rough' (Stone 1996). This could be furthered by suggesting that in holding on to this heterosexual part of themselves that bisexuals 'escape the consequences of living in a heterosexist society' (ibid).

It is also the 'high and mighty' aspect of bisexual politics which has disturbed some commentators and it is clear that there are common-sense problems with such a line of reasoning. One could argue that to suggest that bisexuality has the potential to 'teach' others the true nature of sexual identity is Utopian. There are dangerous undertones of bisexuality being 'better' or more evolved than any other sexuality. Such a theory questions so many pre-conceptions on gender and sexuality:

…bisexuality as a definite human species would disrupt the very classificatory alliance of sex/gender and sexuality. It threatened to absorb both of these differentiating human registers and dissolve the boundaries of human identity. (Angelides 2000:47)

This wonderfully succinct quotation from Angelides poses a question for consideration, what then is the future of bisexuality and the surrounding debates? Garber has popularised a very recent undercurrent in theorisation on bisexuality, the idea that there is no such thing as bisexuality or a bisexual identity as such. Rejecting such categorization will help us to rid ourselves of the constricting boxes into which marginalised groups are placed. The work of Highleyman (1995), who writes from a politically anarchistic perspective, and Daumer (1992) in particular suggest that the true nature of the bisexual project is to move away from all means of sexual identification. Such categorization of gender, sexuality and so forth, only leads to marginalisation. However, it would seem that Daumer would advocate adopting a bisexual identity (indeed see argues that everyone should) because in doing so we have the opportunity to overthrow certain traditions which have made bisexuality incompatible with society. Here such ideas as monosexuality, monogamy (although many bisexuals would disagree that this is anything to do with bisexuality) and perhaps even the role of gender in relationships would be thrown into question.

Such opinions are not universally held by contemporary theorists. Eadie for example sees bisexuality as 'simply one way amongst many of learning what is and what is not erotic, what such feelings mean, and the culturally sanctioned forms in which they may be expressed' (Eadie 1997:8). In many respects Eadie rejects any definition that is not

based on the social constructionist perspective. He attacks any attempts to suggest that bisexuality might be something more and is particularly scathing towards Garber who suggests that bisexuality might have a wider purpose. The Bi Academic Intervention have been vocally dismissive of the work of Garber in particular. The standpoint can be summarised thus: Bisexuality is not the final great sexual revolution, bisexuality is not a solution to problems (one must assume they are talking about issues regarding sexuality, gender and identity) as it is too problematic itself. Finally the group state that bisexuality cannot fundamentally change the way society is organised, it cannot disrupt structural oppression (Storr et al. 1997:4).

Rust also feels that bisexual politics, although is potentially radical, is of no real concern for bisexual women. When asked about their thoughts on politics 'seventy-seven percent listed women's or feminist issues and 49% listed gay issues, but only five respondents mentioned lesbian issues and none mentioned bisexual issues' (Rust 1995:222)

It would seem that there is a divide amongst academics (and indeed activists) as to the future of bisexual politics. It would seem that one group is fighting for something in which the other does not believe. Having presented a review of the literature on defining and understanding bisexuality and the politicised nature of bisexuality it is now important to look at the literature which has attempted to bring these ideas together, to explore how individuals identify as bisexual and what it means to identify as bisexual in both practical and more private terms.

IDENTIFYING AS BISEXUAL

Having explored the impacts of different discourses upon bisexuality, how then does bisexuality work on a practical level in everyday life? In other words how is bisexuality done and enacted? What does it mean to identify as bisexual? Bisexual identity itself is a difficult issue because of the complex nature of what it actually means to be bisexual. Roberts summarises this problem in relation to the bisexual movement:

…the problem with focusing on the differences among bisexuals is that it makes building a movement more difficult. Basic questions (who we are, how do we define ourselves, what are our goals, how do we achieve them) have elicited a stream of contrasting views from self-identified bisexuals, and in this respect it is remarkable that bisexual communities have emerged at all. (Roberts 1997:67)

If all bisexuals are not unanimous as to what bisexuality is, then it is difficult to identify as bisexual because there is doubt over exactly what you are subscribing to. In this scenario bisexuals are cautious to label themselves as bisexual because of the potential connotations of what 'bisexual' actually is, they might be subscribing to something they do not particularly agree with. This also highlights a further problem which Jenkins highlights (Jenkins 2000:4) in that identity is both socially and culturally situated. Dillon states in terms of gay Catholics that to define oneself as a gay Catholic in the US may be very different to being a gay Catholic in the UK. Indeed, 'both Catholicism and being gay have different meanings in different cultural settings…' (Dillon 1999:13)

It would seem from the literature that although bisexuality is wonderfully diverse, as discussed in the first section of this chapter it is clear that the underlying idea which has been claimed by bisexuals is the ability/need/desire to be romantically involved with members of both sexes. This can be exclusive or simultaneous in nature. Most bisexual respondents would see this as a fair basic outline of what it means to be bisexual (examples of this are numerous, to name three: Toft 2005, Bi Academic Intervention 1997 has instances of such an outline, Rust 1995). Other variants on bisexuality are given sub-sections or labels to distinguish themselves and to relate to others.

I would like to push this difficultly with identifying as bisexual further by using to work of Barry Adam (1995). Adam argues that in order for something to become an 'identity' it needs to fit five main criteria:

1- The existence of large numbers in the same situation

2- Geographical concentration

3- Identifiable targets of opposition

4- Sudden events or changes in social position

5- An intellectual leadership with readily understood goals.

Using Adam's five points of reference it is clear that bisexuality meets the first four aims. There are clear bisexual communities where people meet and so forth. However, it is point five that appears problematic because as discussed in the previous section there is most definitely not 'an intellectual leadership with readily understood goals'. To the

contrary, the diverse nature of the bisexual community has been an excuse for the fact that there has been no 'bisexual movement'. Altman for example, argues that most bisexuals during the 80's (in particular) chose to identify as gay because the gay movement had focus and was clear regarding its aims (Altman 1982). Although things have moved on since the 1980s it still remains the case that we are yet to witness a popular bisexual movement.

Weeks uses Adam's criteria to successfully argue that gay and lesbian identities fit this criteria, indeed he suggests that in politicised sexual identities these should be present (Weeks 1991:78). I would argue here that using this rationale shows that bisexuality is not a valid identity (theoretically). However, people do identify as bisexual so what makes bisexuality different? One argument is that bisexuality is a post-modern phenomenon (Hall 1996a, Storr 1996). It is a culmination of everything post-modern theorists use to describe our society, in terms of its flexibility and fluidity. This has links to hugely influential theories put forward by Giddens among others when he discusses the decline of traditional authority structures and the rise of a more agency driven society. Giddens argues that the loosening of structures such as the Church have led to individuals being able to construct their life-stories themselves without the constraints of structure (Giddens 1991). Heelas (1996) has also argued that one of the key components of post-modernity is the fact that we rely less on traditional moral societal codes. The literature on bisexuality seems to suggest that this is the case with the life stories of bisexual people. Due to the lack of traditional blueprints for how they are 'supposed' to live they have been able to construct their own personal life paths. This has been discussed in relation to homosexual men in Heaphy, Weeks and Donovan (1996) but it is also evident throughout bisexual research although less implicitly, particularly in the work of Ochs (2009) whose respondents seem to suggest that bisexuality means whatever you want it to mean and without any reliance on social structure. As Heelas would argue, the standard biography becomes a chosen

biography as people often find themselves in the position of having to construct their own ways of life (Heelas 1996:5.)

There are commonalities amongst the experiences of bisexual individuals and there seems to be a clear enough simple definition of what bisexuality is for people to subscribe. As Angelides (2001:5) argues, although bisexuality has been tainted by stereotypes in our modern understanding of the term it is still in its infancy and to abandon it now would be counter-productive. Although the language itself has become problematic to some people it seems rather early to dispose of the term when perhaps education would be an easier. Bisexual identity then seems a rather individualistic identity to adopt, something which is negotiated with seeming little conscious acknowledgement of traditional life-paths or narrative structures. It will be fascinating to discover how such an apparently personal life project can be managed in conjunction with a religious identity within organised religion. In the following section I will explore the literature on religious identities.

The above exploration has shown bisexuality to be diverse and multilayered. It has shown that bisexuality is often personalised and perhaps even individualistic in some respects. It has also shown that bisexuality has become politicised and even radicalised in some of its forms. The purpose of this section of the literature review has been to explore what bisexuality is and to explore what a bisexual identity means. I have shown that although it means different things to different people there are commonalities and themes which run through the research. The purpose of this research is to take this complex and difficult picture of bisexuality and to ask what happens to it when we put it alongside a Christian identity. Can such a complex sexuality exist alongside Christianity and what negotiations, if any must take place in order for it to do so. Without this picture of the research landscape on bisexuality there would be no starting point by which to measure the management and negotiation of identities which takes place. The chapter now moves on to

explore Christian identity with the same rationale. In order to know what happens to a Christian identity when one places it alongside a bisexual identity, first we need to understand what the literature says about contemporary Christian identity.

SUMMARY

This chapter has explored the literature on identity and current popular understanding of how it is negotiated and 'done' within society. This was then pushed further by exploring bisexuality in specific relation to how bisexuality is understood and thus defined. In doing so I have shown that bisexuality is a complex and difficult concept to grasp and seems to be rather personal. However, I have outlined the main trends and the history of research into bisexuality presenting a picture of how bisexuality has been understood and the current understandings. It is clear that bisexuality as a concept is potentially radical and holds political power, therefore the chapter explored the implications of bisexuality in relation to sexuality and gender in general particularly in relation to the challenge from lesbian feminists. The section concluded by taking what had been discovered from the previous sections and asking in relation to the literature where does bisexuality stand as a sexual identity? This section explored how bisexuality is understood as a sexual identity having discussed the complexity of bisexuality as a concept and the radical potential of bisexuality. This literature has been accessed because the research project explores what it means to be bisexual and Christian and the negotiations which take place in order to identify as both Christian and bisexual. Therefore before attempting the empirical research a clear picture about what it means to be bisexual needs to be ascertained.

CHAPTER 3: EXPLORING CONTEMPORARY CHRISTIAN IDENTITY AND NON-HETEROSEXUALITY

INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter was an exploration of identity and bisexuality and what it means to people who identify as bisexual. This exploration was undertaken by looking at understandings and definitions of bisexuality, the more radical politicised implications of bisexuality and finally what it means to identify as bisexual. This section aims to do the same in relation to Christianity and then to ask what the literature says about bisexuality and Christianity. This section explores the literature on contemporary Christianity and the role of religion, exploring the theme of lived religion. The section then takes this idea and applies it to non-heterosexuality[2] in general, exploring the literature on non-heterosexuality in relation to Christianity. This section aims to uncover the main themes from the literature and to discuss them in relation to the current project. It is vital that this body of work is explored because it is often inclusive of bisexuality, studying a range of non-heterosexual people (the most common being LGBT- Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered). Even if

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[2] The term 'non-heterosexual' is contentious as it has an 'othering' effect on those who are not heterosexual. However, I use the term non-heterosexual to demarcate between research on bisexuals (which I call bisexual Christians) and research which focuses on individuals who are anything apart from heterosexual (for which I use the label non-heterosexual). This is to accentuate the difference between research on bisexual Christians and research on non-heterosexuals which in reality tends to focus on lesbians and gay men.

such research is not explicitly bisexual the themes that emerge may be relevant for work on bisexual Christians. The focus is then sharpened and the section asks where the research will sit in the emerging body of work into bisexual Christians. The chapter then moves to explore religious texts and institutionalised understandings of bisexuality and non-heterosexuality in general beginning with an exploration of the Bible and finishing with assessment of the literature regarding the responses from various religious organisations.

CHRISTIAN IDENTITY: INDIVIDUALISATION AND THE 'TURN TO LIFE'

In contemporary sociological thought, religion is seen as a flexible identity rather than a fixed identity. These two distinct viewpoints are highlighted by Roof (1978) and Hammond (1988):

1- Involuntary immutable religious identity. This is a 'collective-expressive' standpoint which places more importance on involvement within the church and the local community. (Roof 1978)

2- Transient, changeable religious identity. This is a more 'individual-expressive' position which places less stress on the community aspects of the church but more emphasis on how individuals project their identity. Hammond uses the example of immigrant Catholics who are forced to

individually assess their religious identity due to a lack of church

community. (Hammond 1988:6)

Hornsby-Smith argues that the first type of religious identity is most prevalent pre-1950s because of the way the Catholic Church was arranged up to this period (Hornsby-Smith 2004:43). In other words people were born into a religious community. Hornsby-Smith argues that the Catholic Church before 1950 'displayed a sect-like exclusiveness and defensiveness against what it perceived to be a hostile society' (ibid). The self in this situation is a collective self defined by interaction within the group. The second form of identity is a form which would seem to fit best in society today. There is a definite separation between the group and the individual and more importance is placed upon the individual and how they negotiate their identity.

It has been argued that since the 1950s there has been a most notable shift as religion becomes less and less voluntary (Hunt 2002:43). Hornsby-Smith (2004:47) makes the distinction:

Whereas previously 'cradle' Catholics regarded themselves as Catholics unless they positively 'opted out', there is a sense in which in the post Vatican II church, Catholics were being asked to 'opt-in', rather as converts had always had to.

Coleman (2004:4) has described the shift as a move from primordialism to situationalism. Primordialism focuses upon the historical continuity and is an expression used to describe how people needed identity for territorial purposes. By identifying a

certain way the individual could fit into the relevant community. This is clearly true of religious identity but with the diversification of society in terms of ethnicity and spirituality such territorial divisions on the grounds of religions are less visible. Hunt (2002:81) argues that in contemporary society managing ones religious identity has become a difficult task due to the fact that primary groups (communities linked directly to the church) have begun to dissolve. He suggests this is due to the social and geographical mobility that we have today.

Sociologists of religion have painted a picture of religious individualism as an emergent force in contemporary society. Both Roof (1999) and Wilcox (2003) paint a picture of religion being filtered through the lens of the self. Such individualisation has been explained by a pluralisation of beliefs, with individuals able to encounter world religions easier, looking outside of the normal prescribed religions (Repstad 2003). Furthermore, there is the suggestion that because religion is allowed to filter through the self, institutions such as the Church have become somewhat redundant in society today.

As was the case when discussing the work of Giddens (1991) there is a situation where people have choice and the choices they make are highly personal. The text '*Blessed Bi Spirit*' (Kolodny 2000) is an excellent example of a collective work of people struggling with their religious identity. Practically every biography and narrative is concerned with defining religion in terms that will fit their sexuality. In the book one author, Rosefire, in a piece entitled 'Is It Too Much Too Ask' describes herself as a Zen Catholic Pagan. She does so for the following reasons: She was raised within the Roman Catholic Church and was happy that it was 'one of the few religions with both masculine and feminine forms of Deity, in the forms of Jesus and the Virgin Mary' (Rosefire 2000:73). She feels that this is representative of herself and her gender identity, therefore she is willing to identify as partly Catholic. With regards to the Zen and Pagan religious identities:

Zen and Pagan traditions offer the coalescence of a sense of duty, choice, and connection extending from one lifetime into another in the principles of karma and reincarnation. These truths help me to make sense out of apparent imbalances in my life. (Rosefire 2000:74).

It would seem that Rosefire has researched world religions and found a combination which fits her lifestyle best. She needs certain things from each religion to make her religious identity complete and whole. This individualisation process has taken place across all of society, not just in the religious realm. Theorists such as Beck and Beck-Gernscheim (2002) and Bauman (2001) continually allude to how we are now living in a state of unprecedented aloneness. Although what this individualisation leads to is unclear it is apparent that we are now spending more time alone than ever before.

The work of Woodhead (2001) and Heelas and Woodhead (2005) is most important here and will be important throughout the thesis. Their idea of the 'Turn to Life' represents a strong trend in the sociology of religion. A move away from religion informed by religious institutions towards a religion constructed with the interest of the individual at the heart. The turn to life asks what can religion do for you rather than what you can to for religion (Woodhead 2001). Woodhead's ideas are much more nuanced however than the example of Rosefire above, and does not represent self-spirituality or a mixing and matching of religious traditions. The turn to life is a turn to 'this' life and 'my' life (Woodhead 2001) focussing upon religion in this life and not the next. Woodhead offers religious identity then as a complex system of negotiation between tradition and personal agency. The turn to life represents a quest for what Heelas calls the 'HS Factor' (2005) or

the Higher Self, or how does one become more enlightened? For identity this represents a fragmenatation or 'sectoring' of identities, moving away from an over-arching narrative towards more individualised accounts. Once again there are similarities here with both Giddens (1991) and Plummer (1995), with the emergence of choice and personal freedom identity becomes a negotiation of various strands of being.

We still crave, however, some sort of community built identity. Although this is less visible in Christian life, Jacobsen has noted that although young British Muslims are often not strictly practising or have little interest they proclaim their religious identity with pride (Jacobsen 1998:120).

Dillon's (1996) work on American Catholics who are homosexual is most illuminating in this area. Dillon argues that there must be a balance between that which is individually constructed and that which fits in with a Catholic identity. In short Dillon is suggesting that although some negotiation is needed for homosexuals to adopt a Catholic identity, as long as this is done within some sort of religious community this can be possible. The group 'Dignity' is one such group:

...Dignity participants assume the authority to interpret doctrine in ways that, autonomous of the official Church teaching, fit with their identity goals, but in this process they also set (contested) limits as to what they may legitimately change. (Dillon 1999:161)

This would seem a positive technique to consolidate potentially conflicting identities. In this instance identity is held in check due to the fact that they are within a group of Catholics.

These examples highlight the fact that there is definitely more than one technique in identity construction and management. I hope to discover if there are any which specifically apply to bisexual Christians or if any have been modified to do so.

Having explored the current trends in research with regards to Christian identity the next section takes this and locates it directly in relation to the research project asking how this now relates to Christians who are bisexual. Due to the relatively small amount of research done on bisexual Christians this section will explore research into what I have called 'non-heterosexual' Christians. This includes research into lesbian, gay and bisexual Christians where the experiences of bisexuals are either seen as being unique or the same as homosexual Christians.

CHRISTIANITY AND (BI)SEXUALITY

The sociological research specifically focussing on bisexual Christians is extremely limited, consisting of Internet journals (mainly in the US) and the book 'Blessed Bi Spirit' (Kolodny 2000). There is a body of work exploring bisexuality alongside homosexuality, and this will be discussed later in the section, but here I refer to research solely into bisexuality and Christianity. I will look at the limited work which has been done in the area and discuss the relevance of previous research.

The common trend with previous research into bisexuality and sexuality has been the concentration on internal exploration, as the work has focussed personal struggles and self-reflection. It is clear that little work has been done to collectively analyse or interpret life-experiences in an empirical fashion. This fact shows that this research is exploratory in

nature because of the lack of research in the same area. However, it is not accurate to say that this is the first piece of research which looks at bisexual Christians. As I intend to argue the research by scholars in the field of Christianity and non-heterosexuality is vitally important in understanding the issues that face bisexual Christians.

Academically, the only collection which is specifically concerned with bisexuality and spirituality is 'Blessed Bi Spirit', a collection of papers once again concerned with personal reflections on how individuals harmonise their sexuality and their spirituality. The book itself is important as it highlights the need for research into bisexuality and spirituality. It is however, a rather limited text because the stories often indicate a distance between the individual and the organisation. However, there is consideration of Paganism (Dobbs 2000), Catholic workers (Dykstra 2000) and the American Presbyterian Church (Craig 2000). It would seem that the response from the individual authors, with regards to Christianity, seems to be to engage in what Wilcox calls the 'Bible Buffet' (Wilcox 2003:56). This is the technique of taking what might be useful from a religion and incorporating it into your life-style. For bisexual Christians this would seem, using the work of Kolodny (2000), a real solution to living as a bisexual individual of faith. However, I remain unconvinced at the applicability of her work with this research project. It would seem that a good deal of the time the respondents' in such research were free to move away from the Church. What happens if this is not possible? Furthermore, what happens if faith is more important to the individual than sexuality?

From the literature I will summarise the overarching themes which have been addressed so far. Firstly, there is the issue of the centrality of the Bible to an individual's faith. This line of reconciliation is popular and the general argument appears to be that the Bible itself has been interpreted incorrectly. Christianity itself therefore is not against non-heterosexuality but the scholars who have translated and documented the Bible have done

so in a hetero-centric manner (Udis-Kessler 1998, Maneker 2001, Reasons 2001). In doing so scholars have acknowledged the centrality of the Bible in the Christian faith but argued that this is not an area of potential negativity towards non-heterosexuals. There has also been an underlying argument that the Christian Church itself re-enforces heteronormality (or heteronormativity), supporting the ideology that any deviation from traditional roles of men and women is somehow un-Christian. This is pertinent particularly with the study of bisexuality. The term was coined by Warner (1991) to explain how society expects, or even demands heterosexuality to be consider the norm. Cohen (2005) has since pushed this further to suggest that in society today heterosexuality is given preferential treatment over other forms of sexuality, heterosexuality is therefore normal and anything other than sexuality is not natural. In regards to Christianity and bisexuality this seems to be central to the concern. Although this will be explored in direct relation to specific denominations shortly it is worth making clear that heteronormativity, enacted through institutions such as marriage has been central to struggles that bisexuals face in access religious space. Heteronormativity underpins traditional Christianity and notions of the family, leaving little room for negotiation for those who do not fit this model.

The second major theme uncovered is that some bisexuals completely dissociate themselves from organised religion. In this scenario the individual moves away from Church-attendance and official doctrine and uses more localised network points of reassurance (such as family and friends). Gibson argues that this is usually personal and due to disagreement with certain aspects of organised religion (Gibson 2000). This had led to the rise of more open-minded churches which preach inclusion. The MCC (Metropolitan Community Church) and the UUC (United Unitarian Church) with large congregations in the UK and the USA are examples of this. Dobbs has argued that the inclusive and open-

armed nature of these Churches has led to an increased interest in these Churches (Dobbs 2000).

It is very clear from this exploration of the literature that so far there is nothing distinctive between the literature on bisexuality and Christianity and the literature on gay and lesbian Christian. Previous research has tended to assilimate the challenges of bisexuals with those of lesbians and gay men. However, there is also an emerging body of literature regarding LGB (Lesbian, Gay and bisexual) Christians where the experiences of bisexuals are thought to be similar enough for inclusion within the banner header, there is also an emerging body of work where bisexual issues are given separate analysis. The work of Yip (1999) and Wilcox (2003) in particular falls into this category. By exploring this body of work we can begin to see that bisexual individuals do face different challenges and we can explore how the experiences of bisexual Christians may be different to the stories put forward by the scholars who research in this area.

Although Wilcox recognises that grouping bisexuals, lesbians, gay men and transgendered people into one group is dangerous because of the 'challenges faced by members of LGBT communities differ not only because of gender identity or sexual orientation, but also because of biological sex, race, ethnicity...' (Wilcox 2003:30). But she does group them together because they all face oppression from 'heterosexual orthodox-gendered populations that persist in conflating gender identity with sexual orientation' (ibid). Overall only 7.7% of Wilcox's study self-identified as bisexual (Wilcox 2003:177). However, the work and conclusions that she has are important because overall she feels that the experiences of bisexual individuals are not distinct enough to warrant separate research/analysis.

Yip points out two of the major research themes on non-heterosexual Christians: Firstly a comparison between religious and non-religious gays and secondly an analysis of the relationship between the individual and the institutionalised Church (Yip 1997b:166). It would seem that for Yip the difficulties with the Church (the Roman Catholic Church in this instance, although the themes are universally applicable) for homosexuals (in this case) is that the Church is too inflexible and too resistant to change. Although Christians are changing, the Church is not willing to do so (Yip 2003). This relates to homosexual Christians directly Yip argues that the example of homosexuality and the Church is a prime example of how the Church has not moved with the times:

> In spite of such profound changes on all levels, the Churches continue with their 'bring them back to the fold' mission, instead of engaging with people in the circumstances in which they find themselves. This not only undermines their credibility and respectability, it also broadens the chasm between people's lived experiences and social reality, and the Church's religious strictures. (Yip 2003:61).

Yip's vast work on the experiences of LGB Christians has also highlighted that religious individuals who are not heterosexual often face prejudice because of the focus upon sex. Yip calls for the Church to abandon its sex-phobic approach in general stating that the Church is using an out-dated understanding of sexuality:

> On the specific issue of homosexuality, their dominant reductionist model that focuses primarily on acts, needs to give way to a new model that encapsulates all aspects of same

sex relating (and indeed human relating), for instance, emotionality, relationality, mutality commitment, risk and trust. (Yip 2003:63)

More recently, along with a steady growth of research into the role of religious scripture which is covered in the following section, the focus has shifted to how individuals use teachings and religious resources to construct their lives and the tension between their religion and sexuality (see Gross and Yip 2010, Trzebiatowska 2009, Phillips 2005). One of the major recommendations has been to create an inclusive, welcoming space for non-heterosexual Christians and for every other else. Furthermore, as will become evident throughout the thesis there has been a move to seeing Christianity in terms of religious individualism. This is often due to the prominence of sexuality in their lives. Wilcox (2002,2003) in particular has explored how faith is constructed using sexuality as the starting point.

There has also been a re-evaluation of what it means to be Christian and what Christians actually believe in. As Barton (2010) has recently argued in relation to homophobia within the Bible Belt of America, Christianity is not limited to Sunday worship. Barton argues that through symbols, signs and paraphernalia, Christianity's homophobia is bound up with other social institutions to make its message more widely heard. Yip (2010) has argued that for many God is most likely to be 'perceived as someone who upholds love and justice, rather than someone who controls and prescribes' (2010:47). Therefore belief is no longer seen as following a set of rules, rather it is a moral code of justice and equality. From the literature on non-heterosexuality and Christianity the over-arching theme seems to be that personal experience takes priority over traditional organised Christianity. Authority structures such as the Church and the Bible take a back-

seat to personal experience. Both Yip (2002) and Wilcox (2002,2003) discuss how these traditions are guides rather than scripts or blueprints which individuals must follow. A similar yet expanded argument is also found in the recent work of Aburrow (2009), who argues that although queer spirituality has been suppressed in Christianity (and ignored in Paganism) individuals have used resources from poetry, art and ritual, or name a few to forge a space for themselves within a religious sphere. Once again, this shows a proactive response to the situation in which they find themselves.

Having briefly mentioned the role of the Bible and religious scripture in this section it is important to explore this in much more detail in the following section.

THE BIBLE AND NON-HETEROSEXUALITY

This section explores the relationship between the Bible and sexuality, specifically any sexuality other than heterosexuality. The rationale for this is that the Bible is central to faith in the Christian religion and its relationship to an individual must be fully explored if we are to understand what Christianity means.

However, there is an underlying issue that becomes apparent here to which I have only begun to hint so far. The issue of the Bible and why it has been a 'problem' for non-heterosexual individuals begins to demonstrate how bisexuality is different from homosexuality. Here I will begin the case that bisexuality is distinct.

The relationship between the Bible and human sexuality is a much debated subject, offering diverse opinions. As Boisvert (1999) has rightly highlighted, gay spirituality continues to grow and has formed a positive response to accusations that the

Bible is anti-gay. Re-interpretation and re-evaluation have been central to aligning faith with sexuality.

The Bible often plays a central role in the construction of an individuals' faith, therefore to fully understand the relationship between an individuals' faith and their sexuality one must also look at their relationship with the Bible.

Research into this relationship is popular and continues to grow. This is particularly evident on the World-wide-web and the numerous websites which have emerged offering academic and semi-academic article on the issue of Bible interpretation. The website whosoever.org has emerged as a rich resource for bisexual Christians. The purpose of the articles on the website seems to be concerned with personal interpretation of the Bible or Christianity in general with relation to sexuality. This is not to say that such resources are of no use. These stories are useful in understanding what issues are important to bisexual Christians and what strategies are suggested for dealing with pressures and potential difficulties of traversing the sexual and religious communities. Amanda Udis-Kessler's article 'Whose Bible is it Anyway: Scripture and Spiritual Self-defence' (Udis-Kessler 1998) is a good example of the type of article. The piece systematically looks at the all the potential problems within the Bible, these are identified as being: translation issues, interpretation, cultural context and the general inconsistencies. The overriding argument would seem that the Bible has been misinterpreted and therefore bisexual Christians should not completely rely upon the Bible for spiritual guidance. It is clear that the website is concerned with theory and becoming comfortable with ones identity as a bisexual Christian.

Very little is explicitly said regarding sexuality in the Bible, the word homosexuality or any synonym on the word is never used. Most of what we take from the

Bible has been interpretation in some form and a good deal is still open to interpretation. The Bible does not know bisexuality and there is no mention of any sort of behaviour that could be fairly categorized as bisexual without further re-interpretation. Therefore a review of the literature which is non-heterosexual is most appropriate here. After this will come a consideration for the applicability for my research.

It is debateable whether the Old Testament should be used in such a context as the book itself is full of contradictions and would appear to have little relevance to contemporary society, this is an argument put forward by many contemporary scholars (Wilcox 2003 is one such example). The main passages which we must look at begin with Genesis 19:1-11, which has been regarded by many as the Sodomites attempted violation/rape of Lot's guests:

> And they called unto Lot, and said unto him, where are the men which came in thee this night? Bring them unto us, that we may know them.

It has been thought that 'to know' in this context infers sexual relations. However, Wright suggests that although there are homosexual undertones the main issue is that the sacred duty of hospitality has been broken (Wright 1994:7). This type of example highlights a split within academia with regards to homosexual acts within the Bible (as there is no such thing as homosexuality as such in the Bible it is more useful to call them homosexual acts). The more liberal, non-literal interpretations and the more conservative, literal interpretations.

Leviticus 18:22 contains possibly the most frequently quoted statement:

You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination. (Leviticus 18:22)

Liberal arguments have attacked the cultural context in which we frame the concept of 'abomination'. The Church of England in their '*Some Issues in Human Sexuality*' admits that in Biblical times the word abomination could refer to ritualised acts of Israelite worship or idolatry (House of Bishops 2003). Therefore to take the word to mean dislike or repugnance might be taking the sentence too literally.

You shall not bring the hire of the harlot, or the wages of a dog… (Deuteronomy 23.17-18)

From Deuteronomy this passage refers to male cult prostitution (dog). However there is no mention that this is any worse than the 'hire of the harlot' which is referring to female prostitution (House of Bishops 2003).

The most explicit and hostile statements regarding homosexuality take place in The Epistle of the Romans 1:24-32. St. Paul's comments here have been most controversial. In particular:

And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompense of their error which was meet.

Here it would seem clear that St. Paul is being very explicit here concerning all acts of homosexuality. Indeed conservative scholars have noted that in order to be as clear as possible he coined his own terminology '*arsenokosta*' which literally means to lie with another man. It is suggested then, that Paul did this in order to encapsulate all forms of homosexuality (Goddard 2004:12). The liberal argument against such a claim would simply be that the homosexuality in Romans is not compatible with modern society (Wright 1994:14). Of course, there can be negative connotations of such an understanding. Wright, for example, notes that incompatibility occurs because we are fallen people. For Wright society today has lost its control and has fallen from grace. Acceptance of such things as homosexuality is the fault of society. Christianity (the Bible specifically) cannot be blamed for its incompatibility.

Rogers (1999) has noted that the main reason that non-heterosexuals cannot be blessed is the fact that they cannot get married. It is therefore suggested that because homosexuality is not included in the traditional understanding of marriage, homosexual couples can never be blessed. Rogers argues that the purpose of marriage is to complete a couple's relationship and accept them into the community of God.

> Marriage is a sacrament of binding together that proclaims and begins to bring about the truth that a couple belongs primary to God and the community rather than to themselves alone. (Rogers 1999:34)

The argument follows that if heterosexual couples in long-term loving relationships can get married, can this not be extended to homosexual and bisexual couples?

The question that now stands is how to non-heterosexual individuals deal with this conflict between their religious and spiritual lives, and if reconciliation is required how is this achieved. The work of Yip (1997) is most illuminating here as he has addressed this question directly and his work needs thorough review as it relates closely to the current research project. Yip argues that there have been four main reactions from non-heterosexual people in relation to the Bible:

1. Attacking the stigma: Attacking the Christian traditions such as: arguing that the Bible has been misinterpreted, attempting to shift the focus towards general Christian principles and challenging the relevance of the Bible in the context of society today. An example of this is given by Stuart (2003) who argues that the socio-cultural context of the Bible has been inappropriately applied to society today.

2. Attacking the stigmatiser: Here the credibility of the Church as a moral guide is questioned or numerous grounds, from the natural fallibility of the clergy to the historical inconsistencies such as the issue of slavery. The Bible is also presented as being very male-centric as Jobling (2002) points out.

3.   The use of a positive personal approach: The increasing use of the self as the centre of religion, recognizing that the Church does not recognize that the homosexuality it knows is not the homosexuality that gay Christians experience. This highlights the view that the Church has a limited understanding of society today, particularly with regard to sexuality.

4.   The use of an ontogeneric (sic) argument: All sexualities are all equally valid because they were all created by God. This is an onto-genetic argument in that it assumes that life comes from one single organism and therefore everything if equally valid. (Adapted from Yip 1997).

Yip (2005) has since developed his arguments here further, arguing that in fact there are in principle three responses from non-heterosexual Christians (and indeed Muslims in the article). These are the defensive, offensive and creative approaches. The defensive relates to arguing against interpretations, potential inaccuracies and the incompatible of the era in which the Bible was written in relation to our own. The focus here is arguing that our understanding of the Bible is somehow flawed. The offensive approach involves the respondents 'launching an offensive against religious authority structures and figures, so as to discredit their credibility and moral authority, and in turn weaken their discourse. Underpinning this approach is the argument that the engagement with texts cannot be separated from the power behind the interpretation and propagation' (Yip 2005:55). The creative approach is most fascinating and involves as it suggests some sort of creative or imagination on the part of the individual. Here the texts

are re-imagined as being inclusive and they are often 'queered'. Most often figures such as Ruth, Naomi and Jesus and St. Paul were re-invented as being 'gay friendly'.

OFFICIAL CHURCH STANCES TOWARDS BISEXUALITY

The final section of the chapter moves to explore the official stances of common Christian denominations. This previous section explored the literature concerning the role of the Bible in the lives of non-heterosexual individuals and suggested why bisexuality needs to be explored as a distinct identity. However, presenting faith as defined by the Bible only does not show the full picture. Christians are also often engaged with the Church as an institution and a place of worship and it is through the Church that they gain knowledge and a sense of Christian identity and community. Therefore it is important to consider what the Church says about bisexuality and non-heterosexuality. In doing so a more detailed picture of what it means to be bisexual and Christian will emerge. These stances are of huge importance if we are to understand how individuals manage their sexuality and spirituality and how these work together because they provide insight on the struggles and pressures put on the individuals.

As previously mentioned there are different components that contribute to a persons' faith and I have previously discussed their internalized beliefs and the relationship with the Bible. However often most important and particularly relevant to their social life is the engagement with the institution of the Church. Christianity, at least to some degree, will usually be informed by a connection with a Church or other organized faith

organization. Therefore it is important to explore the official stances that institutional Christianity holds towards bisexuality. This will set the landscape for my research and contextualize the issues which face the respondents. The section is split into three sections: Bisexuality and the Anglican Church where there will be consideration of the position of the Anglican Church. As the most widely represented denomination in the sample it is important to consider the Anglican response fully. Conservative Christianity, focusing upon the denominations which are seen as being more conservative in their outlook such as Roman Catholicism and Evangelicalism. Although variation exists from church to church, the focus here is upon the official position from the head of the Church and not the local variations, therefore labeling such Churches as conservative is consistent. The final section assesses the response of the more liberal Churches, in this research project this is represented by the MCC (Metropolitan Community Church).

Bisexuality and the Church of England

Here I will consider the documentation and the statements issued by the Church in relation specifically to bisexuality. There are several issues which may affect the relationship between the Church and bisexuality, in particular how does the Anglican Church understand bisexuality and are there faults with their interpretation? Such understandings are not always synonymous with the Church but here I will explore the Anglican Churches official stance.

From the literature I have found three broad obstacles which bisexuals face when attempting to access the Church in general.

1-   Bisexuals are seen to be promiscuous.

If bisexual sexual activity involves simultaneous sexual relations with people of both

sexes then…this would either imply promiscuity or infidelity or both? (House of Bishops.

2003:283)

This is common throughout the literature, and this statement confirms the Anglican

Churches official standpoint.

2-   Marriage vows are incompatible with bisexuality (Rosefire 2000).

As I previously suggested giving the example of the work of Rogers (1999) those

who are not heterosexual are often denied access to the Church because they cannot get

married. The act of marriage is seen as having ones relationship blessed by God. Therefore,

because marriage vows are synonymous with heterosexuality and monogamy then

bisexuality is seemingly incompatible. Currently it is Church policy in the UK to marry

heterosexual couples only.

3-   There is general misunderstanding of the term 'bisexuality'. Particularly the

      need to separate the terms monosexuality and non-monogamy (Wishik, H.

      & Pierce, C. 1995:125).

This also goes hand in hand with misunderstandings discussed in the bisexuality literature review. Bisexuality is often seen as a halfway house and something which is a choice (an individual can chose to be heterosexual for example). This is a solution put forward by the Church will I will discuss later. However, it is clear from the literature that the convoluted nature of the actual term 'bisexuality' has led to non-acceptance. The 2004 document *'Some Issues in Human Sexuality'* could be seen, for bisexuality in particular, as an attempt for the Church to re-visit issues that could not be addressed in its previously consultation document *'Issues in Human Sexuality'* (1994). The document itself is frustrating and unconvincingly constructed. With regards to bisexuality the standard response is often:

…but it is certainly something that Christians need to consider and discuss. (Church of England 2004: 1.4.12).

Yet such a viewpoint of an official publication seems counterproductive. If it is acceptable for lay-Christians to discuss the issues and make up their own mind then the very publication of such a handbook is useless. The conclusions reached in the document do not differ from those of the earlier 1994's *'Issues in Human Sexuality'*:

…if it is felt to be right to maintain the traditional Christian framework in which the God-given context for sexual relationships is heterosexual marriage, then the basic points in what *Issues* says about bisexuality do seem to remain sound. (House of Bishops 2003:283)

There are several conclusions that the document comes to with regards to bisexuality. Firstly, there are ideas put forward about what being bisexual actually involves and how bisexual individuals organise their lives. Bisexuals are seen as being promiscuous as the term implies multiple partners (House of Bishops 2003:282). Here the House of Bishops have actively defined bisexuality to denote people who have multiple partners. Although as I have discussed using the work of Klesse (2008) in particular, it is quite common for bisexuals to be involved with more than one partner it is not accurate to say that all bisexuals are polyamorous. Indeed this is a rather lazy generalisation. The assumption that bisexuals are promiscuous is also an outdated stereotype; during my own previous research I have spoke to married bisexuals and bisexuals who are in committed monogamous relationships without needing more than one partner (Toft 2004).

The most common claim from the Anglican Church is that bisexuality is about choice. It is assumed that because an individual can potentially be sexually (or otherwise) involved with members of either sex then they can simply pick and choose one to be involved with. If then a bisexual individual can choose, they should ideally choose to be 'heterosexual' and then get married.

> If God's overall intention for human activity is that it should take place in the context of marriage with someone of the opposite sex, then clearly the Church needs to encourage bisexual people who are capable of entering into such a relationship to do so... (House of Bishops 2003:283)

If however, the individual chooses to be involved with a member of the same sex then the answer for the Anglican Church is abstinence.

If the proper Christian alternative to marriage is abstinence, then it is clearly right for the Church to advocate this for bisexuals just as much as anyone else. (ibid)

Such a standpoint clearly underlines both monosexism and heterosexism which I have previously discussed. The heterosexism is the assertion that one should choose heterosexuality over homosexuality. The monosexism is also evident. Here the Anglican Church are stating that it is possible to choose to be heterosexual if one is bisexual, or chose homosexuality and abstain. Such an approach is monosexist and sees bisexuality as an invalid form of sexual identity, it is a combination of the two binary opposites which can be turned off if required. Bisexuality becomes invisible because it sits in the middle of both homosexuality and heterosexuality.

The House of Bishops publications also consider the possibility that bisexuality might be a place en route to a real sexual identity. However, there is no room to explore this within the Christian Church.

There does not seem to be any place within the traditional Christian framework for the idea that bisexual relationships should be accepted as part of a process of sexual development... (ibid)

If bisexuals then cannot choose to be heterosexual or choose to be homosexual the Church suggests that counselling is the solution, saying that 'it may well be the case that counselling can help bisexuals to come to terms with their sexual identity... (ibid.)

Therefore, it remains the case that bisexuality is not seen as a valid sexual orientation, or at best it is a combination of heterosexuality and homosexuality which needs to be guided in the right direction.

In order to try to under-mine the severity of such statements the document claims that perhaps bisexuality is not wide-spread, therefore suggesting that the issue may not be big enough to warrant such analysis. The document suggests that most research has exaggerated the prevalence of bisexuality.

> …sexual orientation is something that is very hard to define, and some of the claims that have been made for the prevalence of bisexuality seem exaggerated (House of Bishops. 2003:218).

This is of course an attempted avoidance of the issue. The document here is suggesting that because the Church does not know of many bisexual Christians then it is not a significant issue and not worthy of serious consideration. This highlights the fact that the bisexual population is hidden but suggests that it is hidden because of the fact that they are not welcome within organized religion.

At a basic level the Church sees bisexuality tied up with promiscuity, a bisexual person could never have a real monogamous relationship. However, if bisexuality can be shown to be 'outside' of the Christian understanding of human sexuality then they should be free to explore whatever relationships they need to, as long as they are loving (House of Bishops 2003: 282). It would seem however that if bisexuality can be shown to be outside of Christianity then there can be no reconciliation between the Church and bisexuality.

Such a rejection would render any research potentially useless. This confusing, seemingly off-hand remark could have two possible repercussions. Either that bisexuality is fundamentally un-Christian or that bisexuality could change the way the Church viewed sexuality. The Church would seem to be suggesting that if research could show that bisexuality was incompatible with Christianity, in that a Christian understanding of sexuality cannot comprehend bisexuality then such relationships are to be allowed outside of Christianity. It may be the case that bisexuality is questioning the whole of Christianity's teachings on human sexuality, they embrace Thatcher and Stuart's (1996) summary of the situation:

…bisexuals undermine the whole sexual system, the neat classification of people into homo and hetero, the pathologizing of homosexuality as a heterosexual disorder and so on. (Thatcher and Stuart 1996 quoted in House of Bishops 2003:34)

The idea continues:

If accepted, this theory means that any argument advanced against homosexuality on the basis that heterosexuality is the norm, loses credibility, and it becomes much more difficult to maintain that God's intention was that people should be heterosexual. (House of Bishops 2003:34)

This is a potentially radical statement to make, although it would seem clear that the Anglican Church would never give serious credence to such an argument. Such a

reworking of the understanding of human sexuality asks questions which most people would rather ignore. This also ties in with the documents unwillingness to address such issues face-on. The major issue that arises from this is that it threatens the validity of any research however, it is clear that the Church is most definitely not unanimous on bisexuality. There is great diversity between religious organizations. This is most clear in the spheres of conservative Christianity and Liberal Christianity which I will now move to explore.

Conservative Christianity

Having explored The Church of England, the section moves to look at first conservative Christians and then liberal Christians, in order to present a rounded review of the literature. Furthermore, my sample was diverse so it is necessary to explore what the official stances of more than one Christian denomination are.

Although the term 'conservative Christianity' seems rather tenuous I use it here to simply refer to those denominations who tend to be more traditional in their Christian beliefs and also those who place the Bible at the center of their religion. Conservative Christianity tends to take a literal view of the Bible as the word of God, and is therefore unquestionable. In the scope of the research project and the respondents who took part, conservatism refers mainly to those from the Roman Catholic and Evangelical denominations.

Research into non-heterosexuality within the Roman Catholic Church has been difficult, recently Garcia (2008) reported that the most common response for those coming

out as homosexual in the Roman Catholic Church in Latino countries has been to leave the Church in favour of more accepting denominations. Furthermore, censorship on the part of the Church has been reported by several researchers. Ritter and O'Neil 's work on Fundamental and Authoritarian Catholicism in the US for example has demonstrated the fact that the Roman Catholic Church has censored research which has shown evidence of homosexuality within the clergy. The research concluded that there was a good deal of same-sex genital activity within the clergy and that the Roman Catholic Church must change its stance on sexuality and gender:

> The bishops who were interviewed by the media denied the extent of the problem and accused her of grandstanding…Her religious congregation was instructed by the Vatican to seek a statement from Sylvia retracting her conclusions... (Ritter & O'Neil 1996:96)

The Vatican's educational document 'The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality' calls homosexuality a trial which one must endure and with therapy breakthrough (Pontification Council for the Family 1995: 104). Homosexuality is still regarded as a psychological condition (1995: 105):

> *Homosexuality* should not be discussed before adolescence unless a specific serious problem has arisen in a particular situation. This subject must be presented only in terms of chastity, health and "the truth about human sexuality in its relationship to the family as taught by the Church. (1995: 125)

A recently leaked document from the Vatican outlining the practical guidelines for pastoral care of people with a homosexual 'inclination', recommends that the Catholic Church should distance itself from the hateful reaction of some anti-gay groups. The Church should respect people's dignity as all people are created in the image of God. The document however is clear that any deviance from heterosexual marriage is against God's Will. Man and woman, the masculine and feminine should be drawn together in marriage and then for the procreation and education of children. (Unknown:4) The Catholic Church in this respect cannot move away from the fact that homosexuality does not lead to reproduction, and the marriage cannot be blessed by God in marriage.

The position of the Roman Catholic Church seems rather unmoving from this perspective, however, research such as that conducted by Walton (2007) suggest that the role of music has a vital part to play. Walton suggests that there are strong links to white gospel and gay identity. Thumma's (1991) work on Evangelical Christians suggests there is space within the more conservative religious communities for gay identities. He argues that as the Bible and communal worship is so important to Evangelical Christians the first stage of the process must be to show that it is possible to alter your belief-system and that through re-evaluation of the text the Bible can speak a new truth. The teaching of the 'true' meaning of the Bible is vital because Evangelicalism relies heavily on its teaching. Thumma suggested there are three stages in such a process: Firstly, convincing gay Evangelical Christians (in this instance) that it is permissible to alter your belief system within the Christian framework. This is followed by a re-evaluation of Christian doctrine and an emphasis on teaching the 'true' meaning of the Bible. Then finally integrating the new identity through interaction with other Evangelicals and general social interaction allows the identity to take hold (Thumma 1991:339-341). It is clear that in terms of the more conservative Christians the Bible is very central to the belief system. Thumma's work here

seems to be in line with the more psychology work of Bauer (1976) during his time as a Director of Christian Education in the US. Bauer argues that through positive reinforcement of messages such as God loves all men. He argues that such a message is clear even with conservative Christianity.

Liberal Christianity

In recent years the (Metropolitan Community Church) MCC has emerged as the choice for 'open-armed' Christians within the UK, with a policy of inclusion for non-heterosexuals. Unlike denominations who on a local level turn a blind eye to non-heterosexuality or do not discuss sexuality, it is important to note that the MCC teaches acceptance rather than tolerance (Dobbs 2000:59). The Churches official policy is to include everyone rather than accept everyone. As Lukenbill (1998) has argued the key ethos for the MCC is forge a strong self of personal identity which is supported within a religious context, this helps to reconcile identities which were previously seen as contradictory. The Church is not concerned with 'healing' non-heterosexuals because its goal is to show that sexuality is God-given. This is very much at odds with the approach taken by the Anglican Church which suggests that bisexuals can choose to be heterosexual, as I have previously discussed. I quote at length from their 1997 Mission Statement:

> We embody and proclaim Christian salvation and liberation, Christian inclusivity and community, and Christian social action and justice. We serve among those seeking and celebrating the integration of their sexuality and spirituality (quoted in Wilcox 2003:175).

Wilcox's (2003) work on LGBT individuals within the MCC Church is arguably the most thorough research in the area. Her work is based upon her own research using 72 interviewees from all positions within the Church (pastors, members, attendees and affiliates). Wilcox's themes directly resonate with the current research project as she explores how the participants 'integrate their religious and sexual or transgender identities'.

Wilcox (2003) sees the rise of the MCC as going hand-in-hand with religious individualism where the focus shifts from, as Wuthernow (1998) argues, 'spirituality of dwelling' to 'spirituality of seeking'. As I previously suggested in the section on Christianity and identity, there has been a shift away from belonging and being born into a religion and being free to chose whether to participate in religion. Religion itself has become 'lived' rather than assigned. Clark (1994) argues that lived religion involves 'scripts, practices and human agency', in that although traditions are important within religion it is the reflection upon this that is equally important. Wilcox found that the majority of her respondents engaged in what she called the 'Bible Buffet' or what Dufour (2000) calls 'sifting'. The process where the individual takes what they like rather than having to re-interpret the whole of the text or re-contextualize it. What comes from Wilcox's work is an appreciation that MCC members have connected with God as non-heterosexual individuals. For non-heterosexual people God is with them in a very real way when they come out, offering support and guidance (Wilcox 2002:507). Furthermore, God is represented as love and immanence and therefore everyone is accepted under this Umbrella. Most radically:

...God is not only ever present but is actually present in each person...and if every person is made in the image of God, then God could be understood, at least in part, to be lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender. (ibid)

However, it would seem that most of the individuals found this out during some personal quest and then engaged with the MCC once they knew this (Wilcox 2002:509).

It would seem that the approach of the MCC Church is rather different from the strong focus upon the Bible and tradition that is present in the Roman Catholic and Evangelical Church. Perhaps unsurprisingly, due to its mission statement, the focus of its leaders and members is upon living as both a sexual and spiritual person without changing either aspect to any large degree. Recent research conducted by Rodriguez and Ouellette (2000) in the USA has clearly argued that the MCC successfully allows individuals to reconcile their gay and religious identities, and that the congregation and leadership of the Church played an important role in doing so.

SUMMARY

This chapter has explored the literature on Christianity, exploring the sociological literature on what it means to be Christian in contemporary society. Also what it means to be Christian and non-heterosexual or specifically bisexual. This has been done in order to get a hold on what the literature has said about what it means to be non-heterosexual and Christian, and to explore the themes in preparation for the data chapters. As with the previous point, if we are going to explore what it means to be both bisexual and Christian a

firm position on what it means to be Christian needs to be held beforehand. This also involved an exploration of the debates surrounding the Bible and non-heterosexuality. This has been done because it is an area in which a good deal of research has taken place, but also because Christianity is a religion based upon a text and therefore a thorough examination of the Bible in relation to sexuality is vital if one is to understand what it means to be Christian.

It has also explored the debates surrounding organised religion and sexuality. Focussing upon the Anglican Church, conservative Christianity and liberal Christianity (in the form of the MCC), I have explored the official stances in order to present a picture of what it is like socially to be a Christian. Although the Bible is important privately, Christianity can be very public and the organised Church has an impact upon what it means to be a Christian. Therefore to get a rounded view of what it means to be Christian this exploration is important.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

INTRODUCTION

Moving forward the thesis progresses to a consideration of the research process itself. The focus shifts from the theoretical underpinning of the project towards an exploration of the methodological implications and the construction of the tools used to bring the project to fruition. The chapter begins by exploring the research aims and questions in order to clarify what the methods intend to explore. Taking this into consideration the chapter moves to discuss the research design, this involves how the sample was obtained and the tools used to collect the data. Once a picture of how the research was done is clear, the chapter moves to look at how the process of analysis took place and what techniques and strategies were employed. The chapter concludes by considering the implications of the research which also impact upon the data collection process such as the role of the research and the impact that I have upon the data collected. The final section explores the ethical considerations of such a research project.

RESEARCH AIMS AND QUESTIONS

In order to understand the reasons for the design and implementation of the research tools a brief summary of the research aims is useful. This will clarify what the actual purpose of the research is before looking at how this is going to be achieved. Although these have been discussed in much greater detail in Chapter 1 I include them here so they are at the forefront before moving to explore the research process.

The research project has three major aims:

1. To explore what it means to self-define as bisexual in the private sphere and how such an identity is then constructed and negotiated (as a person of faith).

2. To explore what it means to self-define as Christian and how such an identity is constructed and negotiated within the private sphere (as a bisexual individual).

3. To explore how bisexual Christians construct, manage and negotiate their identity within the private and public spheres.

THE DESIGN OF THE STUDY

The chapter now moves onto how the research was designed, realised and carried out, beginning with the design of the research. Due to the emerging nature of the research area it is not possible to provide any examples of previous research carried out specifically on bisexual Christians. Research on bisexual Christians has primarily been concerned with self-reflection and autobiography, to which this project bears little relation. Therefore consideration of work conducted on the LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered) population in general specifically the work of Yip (1997a, 1997b, 2000, 2002), Dillon (1999) and Wilcox (2002, 2003) has been necessary. One commonality between such researchers has been a commitment to the employment of a variation of methods working alongside each other, or the 'mixed methods' approach. Feminist researchers (one such example is Oakley 1978) have effectively used mixed methods to study under-represented groups.

At the project conception there was serious contemplation on use of focus groups which would have been useful to fill the apparent gaps in the literature. Focus groups would have allowed the respondents to collaborate and discuss the issues that were important to them and had been seriously under-represented in previous research. However, the bisexual Christian community revealed itself to be hidden and not openly accessible. For example, they may be closeted (not openly bisexual) within a strict religious community where any discussion of their sexuality would lead to harm. Conversely there could have been individuals are deeply spiritual but part of a secular bisexuality support group and focus groups may lead to them not being accepted.

Having considered the methods of previous studies (see above regarding work on LGBT Christians) and the practical difficulties of the focus groups, the decision was made to base the methodology on two different stages. The first stage would be a quantitative questionnaire and the second stage an in-depth qualitative interview. The quantitative stage would allow respondents to engage with the research almost completely anonymously and produce a good amount of quality data (Cresswell 1994). This would help in the next phase of the research where much more nuanced and focussed questions could be asked. However, the purpose of an exploratory questionnaire is not to produce quantifiable data only and it was vital to allow respondents space to elaborate when the opportunities arose. As Wellington and Szczerbinski (2007:98) argue the use of open-ended questioning produces data which is fascinating and would otherwise go unrecorded. It is common practice to use the literature review to help formulate the hypothesis and/or the research questions (Creswell 1994:22) but with such an under-developed body of literature the questionnaire phase of the research had to be used to do this also. This would be followed by a qualitative face-to-face stage consisting of an in-depth interview. This would give the respondents the opportunity to talk about their lives and their understandings and experiences.

The research design was divided thus:

Phase 1- Questionnaire. Eighty questionnaires were collected by both postal and electronic means. The questionnaires were constructed using the literature review and helped to inform the interview schedules. The data set produced by the questionnaires is unlike any collected in the UK. Although the qualitative data would be of prime importance with

regards to creating a detailed picture of the lives of bisexual Christians the quantitative data produced a vast amount of general data with regards to age, locality and so forth but also more specific data regarding sexuality and religious beliefs and practices.

Phase 2- Interviews. Twenty very loosely semi-structured interviews took place similar to the model outlined by Wengraf (2001) who has labelled them 'Biographical Narrative Interviews' in that their goal is to produce a focussed re-telling of the respondents life-story with specific focus on areas signposted by the researcher. The schedules for the interviews were unique to the individual respondent and were constructed using their completed questionnaires.

This section has so far concentrated upon the research design and how I as the researcher have selected the tools to complete the research. The chapter now moves onto actually carrying out the research and how I dealt with issues/problems that arose from conducting the current project and the strategies used to recruit the participants.

Sampling

Obtaining Participants

It has been argued previously that research into LGBT individuals is difficult due to the possibility that respondents may be closeted and unwilling to risk exposure of their sexuality. Keenan's work on gay clergy (2007) for example found that due to the secrecy on

the part of the respondents, recruitment was often difficult. It is possible that recruitment of bisexual Christians was as difficult if not more so. Bisexual Christians are misunderstood in both sexual and religious communities. They are ostracised from gay communities (Hemmings 2000, Eadie 1997) and like gay and lesbian people they are often excluded from religious communities. Further to this, it would seem to be the case that even within religious spaces that they are supposedly welcome, such as the MCC (Metropolitan Community Church) respondents had often been made to feel unwelcome. For some the MCC was too focussed around gay Christians without room for bisexual individuals. Such an argument is not new, in 1974 Enroth highlighted the links between the gay liberation movement and the MCC Church, arguing that many saw to two as intertwined.

This will be discussed further in Chapter 6 when there is a consideration of Christianity and social life. The idea of bisexuality, and what people think it means to be bisexual, is so full of stereotyping and pre-judgement that for someone to describe their sexuality as bisexual this results in more questions than answers (Ochs 2008).

Obtaining a representative sample of bisexual Christians was not possible. As Heaphy, Weeks and Donovan (1998) point out in their study of gay relationships, it is impossible to define what other people consider as 'bisexual' (in this instance). Put simply it is not useful or possible to create fixed definitions on such populations. Doing so would impose some sort of preconception on the part of the researcher. A representative sample is not desirable because it presumes things about people, such as what bisexual 'should' be like. For example, if I as a researcher think that all Christian bisexuals are monogamous, then the sample obtained would be rather specific. In other words, it was imperative to not take any preconceptions about bisexuality forward into the sampling stage. As a researcher at this point it was not my role to qualify bisexuality (for example) in any way. Therefore it

is more useful to allow respondents to define their own sexuality and then explore these definitions.

Sampling techniques therefore were very limited. Yip (2008) has shown the important role that support groups/networks play in obtaining respondents, and highlights the important relationship between gate-keeper and researcher. With the assistance of a committed gate-keeper it is often the case that they can access respondents who willing to be contacted. However, unlike the gay Christian population, there are no specific bisexual Christian support groups that I could locate within the UK. There may be unofficial private gatherings but no officially advertised national or local organisations currently exist. Although it is clear that there are numerous LGBT or non-heterosexual Christian support networks the orientations of those attending such groups is unclear and could be a wasted venture. Even if the congregation/support network contained a hundred or more individuals such a technique would result in wasted time and resources. Therefore, blanket sampling- sending a number of blank questionnaires to support groups/networks- could not be carried out due to the financial and practical restrictions in place. It was largely more practical to allow the respondents to come to me and express their willingness to be a part of the research.

The primary means used to recruit respondents was through advertisement in all forms of media, particularly online media and in printed media. This gave me full control as the researcher over what people understood the research was about. It is also a possibility that there is a significant danger that respondents attracted would not be representative due to this sampling. The respondents would have to be aware of their own sexuality and spirituality for example in order to be reading the publications in which the research was advertised. Although with such a small sample size it is not representativeness that the project aims for, it has been shown by Yip (1998) that such

sampling strategies do attract respondents who are more vocal and open about their sexuality. I combined my sampling strategy with snowballing in order to try and balance this and to try and recruit those who would not respond to an advertisement.

I created a four-tier research sampling strategy:

1.   Advertisement through national and local press.

2.   Approaching support groups.

3.   Use of personal connections/networks.

4.   Snowball sampling.

The strategies did not happen as phases and they are not mutually exclusive. As I will discuss in the section regarding my role as the researcher it is vitally important to be both reflexive and flexible in the sampling stages and throughout the research project.

A project flyer was constructed for the purposes of advertising the project to potential respondents (see Appendix 1). This outlined the project in terms of what was expected of respondents, what they should expect from me, the importance of the research and ethical considerations. This flyer was published in various forms in printed media such as: 'Gay Times', 'Diva', 'Shout Magazine', 'QUEST newsletter' and 'BiCommunity News'. Online resources were also used to their full potential and both secular and spiritual organisations were used such as: 'BiCon Live Journal', 'LGCM' (Lesbian and Gay Christian Movement), '(Y)LGCM' (Young Lesbian and Gay Christian Movement) and 'Bi Research JISC forum'.

Although as previously stated there are no specific support groups/networks for bisexual Christians, there are support groups/networks for non-heterosexual Christians which either claim to be all inclusive (MCC) or could possibly contain bisexual Christians (such as QUEST which is primarily for gay Roman Catholics). The gatekeepers of such organisations were approached in order to pass the information on to their members/congregation or if they chose publish it in their newsletter or on their website. The MCC in Manchester for example ran the advert in their printed newsletter and placed an entry on their website for all visitors to read. Examples of such groups who were approached apart from those mentioned are: URC (United Reform Church, First Sunday, and numerous other gay affirming Churches such as Liberty Church Blackpool). It was my aim to advertise in both secular and religious spaces in order to maximise the potential respondent rate.

Getting the advert published was not a straightforward task and I met resistance to its publication. Several Evangelical organisations refused to publish on the grounds that being bisexual and Christian is a contradiction in terms. No other denomination I approached refused to publish the document although the gatekeepers who I contacted were usually part of pro-LGBT organisations.

Snowballing took place even within the first phase of the project. Those who completed questionnaires were also sent a copy of the advertising leaflet to pass onto friends or acquaintances if they could. This snowballing was very successful and often resulted in the information being passed onto other gatekeepers who in turn passed the information onto their members and so forth. I believe that I recruited at least 20 questionnaire respondents through either direct (leaflet passed from me to respondent to potential respondent) or indirect (leaflet passed from me to respondent to gatekeeper to potential respondent snowballing strategies. Lee (1993:67) suggests that one of the key

advantages of adopting snowball samplings such as its ability to reach 'rare' (author's expression) populations and also the fact that the researcher knows the respondents will be suitable:

'Security' features are built into this method because the intermediaries who form the links with the referral chain are known to potential respondents and trusted by them.

Although in my research project snowball sampling is vital there are potential pitfalls of relying on snowballing as a main recruitment strategy. Davies (1986) has particularly noted the bias in recruiting this way. He argues that snowballing often results in a sample which contains a lot of similar minded people, due to the fact that people pass information to their friends who are often similar to them.

The response rate to the research is surprising. The original PhD proposal aimed for 50 completed questionnaires and 10 in-depth interviews, when in fact 80 completed questionnaire were returned. The larger sample has meant that issues that would have gone unnoticed have been bought to attention and although as mentioned there are no claims to representativeness, a larger sample helps build a more powerful argument. I attribute my success in terms of sampling to four reasons:

1. The research on bisexual Christians is so limited that respondents understood that in taking part in the research they would really be giving their community a voice.

2. I approached/advertised through secular and religious organisations and sexuality groups (organisations who support people struggling with their sexuality). The sampling therefore covered all the communities where bisexual Christians could be residing whether closeted in terms of either their sexuality or spirituality.

3. The research project was a flexible as possible particularly with regards to the practicalities of carrying out the project. I fit my activities around the availability of the respondents in terms of location and time. This was combined with a reflexive approach, noting that as a researcher I will influence the research and therefore self-scrutiny is required (Mason 1996:5). This is discussed further in the relevant section.

4. Almost half of the respondents displayed signs of enjoying the interview and saw the process as a therapeutic experience (Letherby 2001). Respondents noted that they had not had the chance to talk about their experiences to anyone. This was reflected in some of the interview lengths, although only scheduled for an hour and a half, interviews often went over two hours in length with the longest being two and a half hours. Talking to me as a researcher who they would never see again, allowed them to discuss things they wouldn't otherwise have the opportunity to.

Although I feel that the response rate was good there are three key factors why respondents may not have wanted to take part:

1. The Anglican Church is still going through a period of uncertainty particularly with regards to gay priests (Keenan and Yip 2004). As Keenan states: 'These events brought about a situation whereby many individuals replaced, and reinforced their defences. Along with this the danger that the project could be seen as 'jumping on the bandwagon' was constantly there, and may have put some people of coming forward'. (Keenan 2005:100)

2. The emphasis was firmly on respondents to contact me and express interest in the research. Although the sample size is smaller than other comparable research projects on for example, gay male Christians (Yip 1996), it would be unreasonable to assume that there are as many bisexual people as gay people. Bowes-Catton's (2005) research highlights the fact that the bisexual community is relatively small.

3.   The only real incentive to take part is 'to make their voice heard'. No financial rewards or benefits were offered. And because I was flexible and went to the respondents to conduct the interviews no travelling expenses had to be paid. I did however, pay for the postage for respondents to return the questionnaires.

Such a collection of quantitative data furthered by the qualitative data created a vast amount of information unlike any dataset in the UK. Here I would like to briefly outline the respondents' I obtained using these strategies. Although the respondents will be

discussed in more specific detail in the data chapters, here I would like to highlight the diversity and success of the sampling:

The only qualifying features in order to take part in the research were that respondents must self-define their sexuality as bisexuality, there were no specific categorisations or pre-determined ideas imposed by myself. For example, there were no preconceptions about the relationship status of the respondents (e.g. they must be in relationships with two people opposite sexes- because this may be a false representation of what bisexuality is). They also had to self-define their religion/spirituality as Christian. What this meant was up to the respondent and it would be part of the questionnaire and interview process to explore this further. A brief overview of the respondents: 47.5% (38) were male and 52.5% (42) female showing a good balance between the sexes. They were aged between 18 and 72 with the average being approximately 29. Eight different denominations were represented: Anglican, Methodist, Metropolitan Community Church, Unitarian, Evangelical, Quaker, Catholic and Russian Orthodox although 35% (28) stated that they had no denomination. 53.8% (43) either never attended or only attended on special occasions, however 28.8% (23) attended weekly. The majority (78 or 97.5%) described their ethnicity as white British and most of the respondents (40 or 50%) were in a relationship (but not married or co-habiting).

The interviewee sample of 20 was varied also, although this was done to fortune rather than planning, as I interviewed everyone who was willing to take part. 55% (11) were male and 45% (9) were female. They were aged between 20 and 72 with the average age being approximately 31. Seven different denominations were represented. Anglican, Methodist, Metropolitan Community Church, Unitarian, Evangelical and Catholic. Four were not regular Church attendees. All respondents described their ethnicity as white British and three respondents were single with the rest in relationships (two were married).

During this section I hope to have outlined how I undertook the research and the general research design. Now the chapter takes this into consideration to put discuss the research tools that were used.

The Research Tools

Having presented a general overview of the sample that I obtained, the chapter moves to explore in detail the research tools used to collect the data. This includes a rationale as to why certain methods were used and their strengths and limitation.

The Questionnaire: Design and Realisation

The questionnaire is used throughout social research as an effective tool of data collection. As there are no comparable studies of bisexual Christians there was no precedent set as to how best to approach the data collection stage. However, research on non-heterosexual Christians, particularly the work of Yip (2000) highlights the effectiveness of using questionnaires as the initial entry point for data collection. The questionnaire in this instance provides the boundaries for the research and helps focus the research aims. Further to this the questionnaire informs the following stage and allows the respondent to shape their own interview schedule. The questionnaire was a combination of both open and closed questions and therefore allowed hard statistical data to be collected and other more narrative data, which would add help to construct life-stories.

The questionnaires (see Appendix 4) were constructed with the research aims in mind. Therefore sections were labelled thus:

1-	Your spirituality: This section looked specifically at how respondents understood their own spirituality. It also explored religious practices such as worship styles and Church attendance. The goal was to produce an overview of what they thought being Christian was about and also what they did as Christians.

2-	Your sexuality: The focus of this section was on self-definition of sexuality and to understand why respondents identified as bisexual. This section also encouraged respondents to talk openly using broad open-ended questions to explore how bisexuality fits with other forms of sexuality.

3-	Life as a bisexual Christian: This was the most qualitative section of the questionnaire and gave respondents the space to tackle important questions such as 'what is it like being a bisexual Christian?' Issues such as reconciliation of sexuality and spirituality were addressed here. This section aimed to explore the social aspects of life.

4-	Support Networks: The respondents involvement in support groups/networks was the focus of the final section of the questionnaire. How bisexual Christian understand, use and participate in support were the

main questions that the section attempted to address.

The above sections resulted in a rather large questionnaire (on average 15 pages in length). To maintain the interest of the respondent a range of questions were used. In addition to simple open and closed questions, attitude test and scale questions were used where respondents indicated their agreement or disagreement with a given statement. Using this method a large amount of data is collected without the direct involvement of the respondent. Put simply, a good deal of data is collected without the respondent having to write too much. Although seemingly lengthy, respondents always completed the full questionnaire and this is an advantage of self-completion questionnaires as respondents were given as long as they needed to complete the questionnaires. This did however mean that questions and wording had to be uncomplicated. As Black points out questions should be short and not verbose in terms of language as the respondents completing the questionnaire are likely to be very diverse (Black 1999:226). Questionnaires were kept as simple as possible and because of the nature of the research when concepts were introduced it was the role of the respondent to define them. For example, a question would not assume they understood what bisexuality means, the questionnaire sought to understand what the respondents themselves understood by the term bisexuality.

Questionnaires, along with the consent form were distributed via email and/or via post. In the case of electronic completion respondents completed both and returned them in separate emails. These files were then saved to my own personal computer (which is not on a network) and coded. The original emails were then deleted. Postal questionnaires were coded and stored in my personal locked filing cabinet. All envelopes or supplementary letters enclosed in the envelopes were destroyed. For those opting for postal completion consent forms and completed questionnaires were returned in separate envelopes for

security reasons. Although unlikely, any interception of an envelope containing both documents would result in a serious breach of confidentiality and harm to the respondent.

The data from completed questionnaires was stored in SPSS ready for data analysis as shall be discussed in the data analysis section. In addition to this separate form of analysis, the data also formed the basis for the interviews as shall now be discussed as the chapter moves forward to explore the construction of the interview schedules.

The Interview: Design and Realisation

The semi-structured interview is frequently used in the collection of data during qualitative research. Mason argues that qualitative interviews produce data unlike any other data collection methods, talking and listening people really allows them to discuss their lives (Mason 2002: 66). Research into bisexuality has a strong line of qualitative inquiry particularly the work of Rust, whose work from the 1990s still in many ways leads the way in terms of research into bisexuality. Rust's research 'The International Bisexuality Identities, Communities Ideologies & Politics Study' (1994-1996) in which she recruited over 900 men and women and collected data through self-administered questionnaires and in-depth interviews, could be seen as the biggest single empirical research project into bisexuality. Although a good deal of academic work exploring bisexuality is theoretical (Storr 1999, Hemmings 1999, Eadie 1997) or auto-biographical (Reba-Weise 1996, Kolodny 2000, Ochs 2008), the semi-structured interview has been used effectively previously by both Wilcox (1999) and Yip (2002) in the study of non-heterosexual Christians.

Interviews have numerous advantages which can add to the quality of the data collected particularly when discussing issues of a sensitive nature such as sexuality, and also information which is potentially very personal such as spirituality and religiosity. Letherby (2000) has noted how when talking about such personal information respondents have treated interviews as therapy and therefore have been able to open up to the interviewer.

Interview schedules (see Appendix 5) were unique to each respondent and based mainly upon the data collected from the research stage. There were also examples of triangulation as issues from the literature were re-introduced at the interview stage. The interview schedules were not a repeat of the issues explored at the questionnaire stage but a focused more nuanced exploration of issues which were pertinent to the individual respondent. Respondents would have more to say on issues that affected them directly and that the questionnaire may have addressed issues that they have no experience of at all.

Researcher flexibility is a key factor in qualitative data collection. Esterberg argues that allowing respondents more freedom has a positive impact on the data collected (Esterberg 2002), further to this Wilcox (2003) and Yip (2002) would argue that this flexibility allows respondents to explore their own definitions and understandings of the issues being addressed. It was my role to make the respondent feel as comfortable and as relaxed as possible, this would allow them to talk freely about issues which could potentially be sensitive and difficult. This assisted by conducting the interviews in locations determined by the respondent, often their place of residence. However, it was sometimes the case that this was not the best location for the respondent, due to secrecy regarding their sexuality or feeling uncomfortable conducting an interview with other people in the vicinity. On these occasions meeting rooms were booked in hotels and libraries making sure that the venues were not told about the nature of the research. These respondents were able to open up in this location because they saw me as a professional stranger who

would treat their data with care but would not see again. However, unlike interviewing respondents in their homes the building of rapport had to be done during the interview rather than before the interview had begun. For example, rapport was often built doing simple things beforehand such as making a cup of tea or talking about and topical things. It was vital that although the setting was more formal, not to begin the interview without some 'chat' beforehand.

Interviews therefore were very loosely structured, resembling guided conversations as much as actual interviews. It was my role as the researcher to present places for the respondent to visit but allow them to explore those places once they had arrived there. Interviews began with an introductory question such as 'what is it like to be Christian?' or 'what do you believe as a Christian?' Throughout the telling of their story I would alert them to issues or interject and press them on issues which were of particular interest to the research project. The interview process was about getting the respondents life-story. Following the lead of previous work such as Yip (2000) the interview produced a flowing narrative touching on all aspects of the respondents lives such as childhood, coming-out, understanding faith. From this life-story the issues of identity formation, negotiation and management would come into focus. Although it was not the purpose of the interviews there were instances where respondents had not answered certain questions, the interviews were used to investigate why.

Interviews were recorded with an electronic Dictaphone without exception. No respondents expressed any concern regarding its use. This could be attributed to its small, discreet size of the recorder. Alongside the recording I kept notes throughout the interview. These notes were reminders if respondents mentioned something of importance but moved onto other subjects. The notes enabled me to return to the topics which I felt would produce interesting data. All recordings were electronically stored on my personal

computer (without network access) in password protected files. Once verbatim transcription of the interviews had been completed original recording files were completely destroyed and transcriptions were encoded to prevent security breaches.

Having collected my data using the tools outlined above, it was important to try and make sense of the vast amount of data that I had. To analyse the quantitative questionnaire data SPSS was used, and for the qualitative interviews manual thematic analysis took place. During the next section the chapter moves to explore exactly what was done with the data.

DATA ANALYSIS

Quantitative Data Analysis

The questionnaire data was entered into and stored within SPSS for statistical analysis. The purpose of the analysis of this data was threefold:

1- To provide an overview of the sample and to understand what constitutes a bisexual Christian (although it is not my intention to generalise).

2- To highlight themes which came to light from the open questions, these formed the basis of the life-stories produced and therefore informed the interview schedules. The questionnaires produced issues/themes that were

not apparent from the literature review.

3- To produce a large data set to compare with other research projects. One example is work on non-heterosexual Christians where the focus is on lesbians and gay men. This would highlight that bisexual Christians face different issues/problems to other non-heterosexual Christians.

SPSS allowed me to produce tables and charts in order to view the statistics unobtrusively. The data analysis that took place was not mathematically complex. SPSS was used to show the major themes and to give an insight into what the respondents thought about their sexuality and their spirituality. Therefore the most common form of analysis used frequency tables and cross-tabulations. Using SPSS to pinpoint particular variables the answers from different questions could be combined. For example, using SPSS it was possible to explore of the sample who were aged over 30, how many were Anglican and thought sexuality was God-given. The cross-tabulations could be rather complex in nature, particularly when exploring relationships. Using SPSS it was possible to ascertain for example, how many of the female respondents were in non-monogamous relationships, and were living with their partners, and furthermore what were the sex of those partners. Therefore SPSS was vital in presenting me with the themes and the background information required to construct the interview schedules, but also to give me a feel of the themes which were present or missed in the literature review.

Qualitative Data Analysis

As previously noted, the questionnaire data was used to construct individual interview schedules, aimed at focussing upon the issues that were most relevant to the respondent. As the project had a qualitative bias the analysis of the semi-structured interviews was a much more detailed and labour-intensive process. The analysis used was manual thematic analysis. This means that the transcripts were used and then using a variety of codes or different inks, themes were identified throughout the interview. Although this seems like a long process it allowed the data to speak, and meant that as a researcher I could re-engage with the interviews after the event. This method also meant that several new documents could be created organised by theme. For example, a document with all the occasions where interviewees talked about their Church attendance. There are computer programmes that organise data in terms of theme (or however you want to organise the data), such as QSR Nvivo, but these were not used. By manually analysing the transcriptions there was a close relationship established between the myself as the researcher and the stories that were told. By reading the actual transcription I could let their stories speak to me rather than forcing the data to fit into boxes.

REFLECTIONS ON THE RESEARCH PROCESS

As a reflexive researcher I understand that my role is never neutral, my actions, appearance and particularly in the case of this research my sexuality and religious/spiritual

belief will all impact on the respondents and therefore the data collected. This section deals with the reflections regarding my relationship with the respondents.

Reflexivity and the Interviewer/Interviewee Relationship

It has been a point well-made in the literature that the interviewer will affect the data collected. As Yip states:

Social research is influenced by the research workers' personal characteristics. Our age, gender, linguistic ability and other qualities influence our ability to form relationships and gather information. (Yip 2008:2.5).

Yip here is talking about researcher reflexivity, a concept that has been defined thusly:

Reflexivity requires an awareness of the researcher's contribution to the construction of meanings throughout the research process, and an acknowledgement of the impossibility of remaining 'outside of' one's subject matter while conducting research. Reflexivity then, urges us "to explore the ways in which a researcher's involvement with a particular study influences, acts upon and informs such research." (Nightingale and Cromby 1999: 228).

Writing about qualitative research in psychology, Willig (2001) has argued that in fact there are two forms of reflexivity: Personal and Epistemological. Willig (2001) defines these types rather succinctly and therefore I quote at length:

Personal reflexivity' involves reflecting upon the ways in which our own values, experiences, interests, beliefs, political commitments, wider aims in life and social identities have shaped the research. It also involves thinking about how the research may have affected and possibly changed us, as people and as researchers. 'Epistemological reflexivity' requires us to engage with questions such as: How has the research question defined and limited what can be 'found?' How has the design of the study and the method of analysis 'constructed' the data and the findings? How could the research question have been investigated differently? To what extent would this have given rise to a different understanding of the phenomenon under investigation? Thus, epistemological reflexivity encourages us to reflect upon the assumptions (about the world, about knowledge) that we have made in the course of the research, and it helps us to think about the implications of such assumptions for the research and its findings (Willig 2001:10)

As a qualitative researcher there has to be a consideration of both personal and epistemological reflexivity, and each idea has to be given consideration. With regards to being epistemologically reflexive, the fact that the area is under-researched meant that I could leave to research as open as possible and then allow the data to speak to me. This meant that in a way the research findings are as much about the data itself as the original research proposal. The personal epistemology is more complex however and requires consideration from seemingly trivial things such as what one wears whilst conducting the

interview to the interaction between the researcher and respondent. In this context reflexivity is general viewed in negative terms where the researcher must be on their guard to stop bias or to think about how they are presenting themselves. However, reflexivity can be used in order to assist the research. Heaphy (2008) points out that whilst considering how the 'social, cultural and academic positioning has shaped the narrative' (4.3) reflexivity is also about giving the interviewer something back, and giving them something to work with and to make the process more interactive.

Finlay (2002) has argued that how reflexivity is used is dependent upon the aims of the research project. The most powerful use it would seem is dissolving the boundaries of 'them' and 'us' or 'insider' and 'outsider'. This will be discussed in the following section but it is important here to say that reflexivity can be used if desired to situate the research within the 'inside' sphere and to become an ally to the cause.

Reflexivity however, has consequences for the interviewer as well as the actual data collected. Sampson et al. (2008) has warned against the 'cost' of reflexive research methods for the actual researcher. It is argued that in being reflexive and involving ourselves with other people's relationships will inevitably distress the person conducting the research. The summary they provide for this feminist approach is 'no pain, no gain' (Sampson et al 2008). Here it is the emotional burden that becomes problematic. If one is interviewing victims of violence for example as a victim of violence, then the emotional involvement will inevitably be very demanding.

Reflexivity then can turn the interview process into a two-way conversation where we take Weber's lead and declare our biases (Yip 2008: 2.6). I can see several reasons why such an approach would be taken: Firstly, such openness would hopefully give one access to data as 'one of their own'. In being inside the group you are studying respondents would

be more honest and forthcoming. Yet this can have consequences too, as will be discussed in the next section. Increased reflexivity could lead to easier access to potential respondents if gatekeepers know that there would be sympathy shown to potential respondents. A critical response to ones owns community is highly unlikely. Finally, respondents can relate to the telling of your story in order to reflect about their own narratives. If there is commonality with the stories data collection is likely to be easier.

Yip (2008) has warned however, that there needs to be a distinction between 'doing' reflexivity and 'being' reflexive and it is the 'being' that is most useful. 'Doing' reflexivity seems to refer to a constant state where the interviewer's story becomes as important as the respondents', they are also forced to 'out' themselves, not simply in terms of sexuality (in my research) but also in terms of other key issues. 'Being' reflexive implies less involvement on the behalf of the researcher. It refers to reacting rather than enacting in that the researcher is able to offer prompts to assist the respondent in relation to their own personal experiences rather than fully immersing themselves in the story. This therefore does not always require the researcher to disclose information that they do not desire to. This is a difficult area in qualitative research and something that I was always aware of when conducting interviews as will be discussed in the following section.

Situating Myself as the Researcher

The key issues that I had to address were whether to tell interviewees whether I was Christian or not and that I was not bisexual before conducting the interview. I could either tell them if they asked or to side-step the issue. I felt this was unethical and unfair to respondents who had given up time in order to help me. In order to be consistent I

decided to tell respondents before the interview if it was raised. This took the form of a short explanation as to where I would indicate my personal involvement in the research area. This meant that in terms of sexuality I was setting myself up as an 'outsider'. However, as someone who was raised religiously I felt that in terms of their religious lives I could relate as an 'insider'.

There were three main concerns that I had to address:

1- Why I was doing this research. This was the most common question I received from the respondents and usually came before the interview. The response had to be considered as my answer would affect how respondents related to me and the stories they would tell. My reasons for doing the research are grounded in an academic interest in that I am using the life-stories of bisexual Christians to look at identity, the role of support groups/networks and official Church standpoints on human sexuality. However, I indicated my own personal interest in the religious aspect of the research and this seem to effectively satisfy the query.

2- My sexuality. I took the standpoint that I would be open about my own sexuality although it put me partially outside of the community that I intended to investigate. Although, as I shall discuss, this is viewed as problematic by some scholars and researchers, I argue that the there are as many positive reasons for being outside of the participants' community.

3-   My religion/spirituality. Respondents were not as inquisitive about my own religion, however I was open with respondents that I had been brought up in a rather strict Anglican school and attended Church at least weekly until the age of 16. More recently my faith has not belonged within any particular denomination. As religious individuals respondents took this to mean I was a someone struggling with faith and opened up particularly well when discussing the potential dissonance between spirituality and sexuality.

Although being outside a group seems problematic, scholars are not unanimous in this and warn that being an 'insider' can indeed negatively affect the data collected. 'Insiders' may have: easier access, stronger trust bonds, more empathetic understanding of the situation. However, it is not this clear-cut. Naples (1992) in particular has suggested that such categorisation of insider/outsider is problematic because as Yip states the LGB population is not 'monolithic' (Yip 2008: 6.4). The LGB community is diverse and cannot (just as the heterosexual community) be neatly summarised in order to produce a model to which one must conform. In a nutshell there is no archetypal bisexual individual. There are examples where being outside of the community which is being studied can benefit the research taking place. For example being outside gives you potentially a less biased standing and respondents are less likely to try and provide 'safe' answers for fear of not being a valid member of their community.

As Heaphy, Weeks and Donovan (1998) have pointed out difference is as important as similarity. It is also important to note that although the research was concerned with sexuality and Christianity there are other things that the researcher and respondent can relate to one another using. Age, sex, geographic heritage, interests can all be used.

Reflections on Ethics

The research project began in October 2006 through to September 2010. This section looks at reflections on the ethical considerations made during this time-scale and how I dealt with particular problems and issues. This issue has been touched upon during the section on research design and my actions during recruitment, data collection and analysis have been discussed, but this section hopes to make clear my overall ethical commitment.

The project undertaken is a sociological exploration with relevance in the field of social policy therefore the British Sociological Association guidelines were followed throughout (http://www.britsoc.co.uk/equality/Statement+Ethical+Practice.htm).

The most important consideration when dealing with data that is sensitive or at least potentially sensitive (after the anonymisation process has taken place for example) is protecting the confidentiality of respondents and attempting to guarantee anonymity. Due to the nature of the recruitment process it was not left to me to contact the potential respondents in the first instance. Therefore there was no chance participant details being misplaced or becoming public.

Reassurance was key in order to settle respondents and to hopefully encourage them to pass on the advert in which they saw my call for respondents. The main tool I used here was the consent form which was sent out alongside the questionnaire and outlined all of the key ethical aspects (see Appendix 3 for the consent form). It was most important to cover:

1-   How the data was to be collected and stored.

2-   How the data would be used.

3-   Some basic information regarding myself and the project.

Throughout the research process all data collected was anonymised. Once collection had finished participants were assigned pseudonyms at random. Upon dissemination there would be no way to link respondents to data.

This section represents the end of the theoretical content of the thesis, and the last which does not use any data from the research project. Here the thesis moves to explore the data collected during the research process.

SUMMARY

The focus of Chapter 4 has been upon the research process itself. Here the research aims and questions were fully developed to give a full nuanced understanding of the scope of the research project. The aim of the chapter was to present how the research took place, the methods used and the considerations that took place along the way. This has been achieved by exploring how the research was designed, how the data was then analysed and then with reflections on the research process.

CHAPTER 5: EXPLORING RESPONDENTS' SELF-DEFINITIONS OF SEXUALITY AND FAITH

INTRODUCTION

The first of three data chapters, Chapter 5 is an exploration of the self-definitions of sexuality and faith, and the implications that these definitions and understandings have upon daily life. The first section of the chapter will directly tackle the 1st research aim: To explore how identity is negotiated and done through the self-definitions respondents constructed of bisexuality within the private sphere. The second section moves onto the 2nd research aim: To explore what it means to self-define as Christian and how such an identity is constructed and negotiated within the private sphere (as a bisexual individual).

The literature, as reviewed in Chapter 2, suggests that bisexuality is varied and means different things to different people, suggesting that there are multiple definitions of bisexuality (see Ochs 2009, Reba-Weise 1992, Tucker 1995). This chapter is an exploration of the definitions that the respondents gave to their sexuality and what bisexuality means to them. There is a distinction between the personal and the social and a variety of tensions manifest when these spheres collide. The chapter explores the more personal privatised definitions respondents constructed and the practical meanings in relation to the theoretical standpoints perpetuated in the literature. Having done this for the respondents'

sexualities the chapter explores how respondents' defined their faith in the light of how they understood their sexuality. This section explores what Christianity means to the respondents and how they constructed their faith as bisexual individuals. The literature (Chapter 2) has suggested that Christianity is a more personalised project than ever and in this section this is explored in relation to the data.

EXPLORING RESPONDENTS' SELF-DEFINITIONS OF SEXUALITY

Introduction

As discussed in the literature review (Chapter 2) defining bisexuality appears to be a difficult task, due to the individual variation that exists between individuals who identify as bisexual. There are multiple and wide-ranging definitions of bisexuality. Research has often attempted to produce universal definitions (Klein (1993) and Weinberg et al (1994)), yet some have argued that there a multiple definitions (Rust 2000). I argue here that there are indeed multiple definitions.

The chapter is an exploration of the various ways respondents defined their sexuality. There are three main definitions that arise:

1. Bisexuality as a combination of sexual history, behaviour and attractions.

Here the respondents understand their sexuality in terms of their history and the relationships and encounters they have had (sexual history), the things they do and have done sexually (behaviour) and their attractions in the past, present and future. Although such definitions can be complex they can also be rather simple with respondents arguing that they are bisexual just because they have had relationships with both men and women throughout their lives. Here bisexuality is seen in terms of homosexuality and heterosexuality and in many ways bisexuality is a combination of both of these.

2.   Bisexuality as a flexible form of sexuality which challenges dualist thinking both in terms of gender and sexuality.

Bisexuality is seen as a form of sexuality which is not confined to understanding sexuality and gender in terms of heterosexuality and homosexuality or masculinity and femininity. The flexibility of bisexuality is seen as a way of undermining this dualistic thinking.

3.   Bisexuality as a radical form of politicised sexuality.

Most radically bisexuality is understood as a political statement. This is often combined with an assertion that bisexuality is not about physical or gendered attraction but as an attraction to other characteristics.

The chapter takes these three broad definitions and explores them. What must be made very clear from the beginning is that these definitions often overlap and respondents often use complicated combinations or adaptations in their discussion of what their sexuality means. It is rather an exploration of the themes and ideas that the respondents' presented to me, which have been shaped into some kind of thematic structure. The first section deals with the first broad definition. The second section explores the second and third broad definitions and the various factors that make up such a definition. This section has been entitled 'complex definitions' to reflect the fact that such definitions are often multi-layered and go beyond seeing bisexuality as an attraction to members of any sex. The third and final section is an exploration of some of the more simplistic definitions offered which come from the first broad definition. It was often the case that these were preferred to the complex definitions. As will be explored throughout the respondents had to use simplistic definitions because they encountered resistance to any definition which questioned monosexuality (the attraction to one sex only).

The section begins by exploring how history, behaviour and attraction influence sexual identity. It is my argument that these three factors (and relevant sub-factors) played a key role in identification, however, the opposite side of the argument will also be considered.

Sexual Histories, behaviours and attractions

The story of Adam, a 63 year-old Anglican man is particularly interesting. He got divorced about 4 years ago but has now found a same-sex partner. Furthermore he is a good example of how bisexuality is framed in reference to sexualities which are more easily understood to society in general. Specifically he discusses bisexuality in direct relation to heterosexuality and homosexuality; talking about how 'heterosexual' he is for example. This is a strategy that he uses to make sense of his own sexuality, both for himself and for others. He needs the stability of strong sexual identities as reference points because this makes him feel settled and secure. Adam describes his sexuality as a combination of heterosexual and homosexual desire and he is happy to use this split as a way of understanding his sexuality.

I wander around both [heterosexuality and homosexuality]. I'd say nowadays in practical terms I might as well be gay. But I also know from my side of it, my sex life when I was married was fine. I know guys who have been married and would say they are gay and I'd say you must have had a reasonable sex-life and they'd say 'no I used to hate it', and that just wasn't me, so that's why I think bi suits me. I wander round all that. The quick version is that I guess I'm bi but you might as well call me gay if you like, it's a label, does it matter really? So I wander round both.

Here Adam is what I have labelled as historically bisexual. Using his whole life so far as an indicator it is apparent that he has been involved in relationships with members of both sexes. Therefore being historically bisexual simply involves at least one relationship

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with a member of the same-sex and a member of the opposite sex at some time during their lives. This can also apply to those in relationships with members of both sexes at the same time. What is important is that they have been romantically involved with members of both sex at some time. It is implied that this relationship involves behaviour and feelings to qualify it as a relationship. For example, sexual practice, emotional attachment, spiritual connection and so forth. However, although seemingly encapsulating the very idea of bisexual historicism this is taken further by Adam as he often willingly divides his sexuality into homosexuality and heterosexuality and combines it to make bisexuality. The following quotation highlights this:

> I think...to take my point from earlier on. I am choosing...in relationship terms...I am choosing to go in the gay direction, so I am choosing to leave behind the straight relationship possibility. A: because I've done that for a long time anyway, B: because the only way that would work is with a partner who would accept what I am, and there are not many women around who would. And I'm not planning now on looking for one who would.

In this quotation Adam is clearly dividing his sexuality into two portions, his heterosexual and homosexual sides and his sexuality is decided by which 'part' of him feels the most strong at any given time. It would seem that for Adam bisexuality is a combination of homosexuality and heterosexuality and he is clear upon what his bisexuality means to him. He does not need to separate bisexuality. This perhaps underlines the power of the dominant dualistic discourse on sexuality which understands sexuality in terms of binary opposites. Bisexuality is conceptualised as a combination of sexual history in terms

of both behaviour and feelings and current/future sexual behaviour and feelings. Historically he views his actions towards his wife as a validation of his heterosexual side and not as a phase before realising his real (or true) sexuality. Even before his wife he talked of how he was physically attracted and enjoyed sexual encounters with members of the opposite sex. In the present day he has actively sought gay liaisons and has turned off the possibility of a heterosexual relationship. Yet Adam is keen to not let these current activities completely negate his 'previous life' and he puts the heterosexual and homosexual activities (and feelings) together to describe himself as bisexual. When discussing the challenges of being bisexual he makes a rather contentious comparison between being bisexual and being of mixed race.

> Commonly if you are bi, you are married. Ok, I'm not and there are plenty of others who are not. The main challenge I think is that you tend to think best of both worlds. No it's not it's the worst of both worlds, because you are not really part of either. Gays will sometimes say...I think someone quoted...saying that there is no such thing as bisexuality. You are just gay and you are cheating. My reaction would be well if you were [bi] you might know more about it. It's like people who are straight saying you just choose to be gay. No! Why would anyone want to choose such a complicated situation? I think that being bi is almost worse than being either. Rather than having a foot in both camps, I don't know this from personal experience but perhaps it'll be like mixed race people, they are neither white nor coloured, they're sort of sitting in the middle, I'm guessing on that.

Although it is apparent that his relationships in the near future will be homosexual, labelling himself homosexual would deny the importance of his previous relationships and not fully encapsulate his sexuality which is very aware of history.

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The importance of history in defining one's sexuality was suggested firstly through the questionnaire data collected when respondents chose to skip the questions relating to physical, emotional or spiritual attraction. It is possible that the respondents preferred to construct their own definitions which did not refer to physical, emotional or spiritual attraction. Nicole, a 20 year old from the South-West of England stated:

Throughout my life I think I'll have both male and female partners, as I have up to now. Therefore I choose to call myself bisexual.

The point that Nicole seems to be making is that sexuality is often viewed in terms of behaviours and actions. When an individual has a same-sex experience this does not override previous encounters, it simply adds to them. Rather than being seen as a coming-out point a same-sex encounter is simply another stage of sexual life. This has been forcefully argued by Garber (2000) as in practice those who stray from their defined sexuality are normally seen as a mistake or being sexually adventurous. She uses examples from popular culture such as Elton John to make the point (Garber 2000:145). Although historically bisexual it is much easier to see the singer and pianist as a gay man. An interviewee I spoke to called John shows that in private individuals often make the choice themselves as to what bisexuality means and when to apply the label. John had been married to his female partner for over 16 years at the time of interview and had lived with her since their marriage. He has never had a long term relationship with a member of the same-sex only brief experiences and what he called close male friendships, which were exactly this, friends who were men where they talked and shared time together. Yet for John these same-sex experiences do not mean he wants to leave his wife or call himself

homosexual. They are a confirmation that he is bisexual and desires intimacy (or even close friendships) with members of either sex, though not necessarily at the same time. John argues that this is often the case for a lot of men who are married but desire same-sex relationships. His point here is that there are 'a lot of married gay men who would call themselves bisexual, but what about your wife... even if I was at the far end [referring to the exclusively gay end of the Kinsey scale- a number 6] there is a difference between me and people who couldn't marry at all in any shape or form because they couldn't even begin to relate to a woman...but I find the term bisexual unhelpful because it infers that I can take it or leave it either way, which is not right'. (John)

There are several issues of which to take note with regards to John's statement. Throughout the interview it was apparent that although he considered himself bisexual because of his personal history, specifically his actions and attractions throughout his life, he was never comfortable labelling himself as bisexual. Although for him bisexuality referred to history, there are also unwanted connotations of bisexuality such as the suggestion that bisexuality involves having multiple partners. Although this isn't what bisexuality means to him, the strength of these stereotypes often overwhelmed his own convictions.

To return to the example of Adam here, all these respondents classified their relationships and their sexualities whilst in those relationships as either heterosexual or homosexual and then viewed themselves over their whole lives as bisexual. In short bisexuality is seen as a combination sexuality which can be understood with reference to these other, perhaps more commonly understood sexualities. He told me of a friend he met recently:

I know one guy, and it's not a secret as far as I'm concerned...I've had a significant

amount of time on gaydar[3], and there is one guy I met from there...who is married, his

wife is well aware... And he said, well, when they first met it came up pretty early on that

he fancied men as well. It just wasn't an issue; it wasn't the site of great revelation or

anything. He's married and every so often she knows he's going out and knows why he is

going out and it's not a problem. My reaction to it was you lucky bugger! How many bi

married blokes are there in that situation? Where...he needs some gay play time to keep

his head going but he is basically married. That for me almost optimises what being bi is

all about...

This further enforces the view of bisexuality as a catch-all name used to categorise

individuals who are historical (in terms of marriage) heterosexual but enjoy homosexual

play time. Therefore there is something about Adam's friend here which craves this 'extra'

sexuality as his physical sexual desires are not met within his heterosexual relationship.

Here bisexuality is reduced to a sexual practice which because of its importance in his life

becomes a way for him to understand his sexuality as a whole. Bisexuality therefore is seen

as a double-sided coin with heterosexuality and homosexuality on opposing sides and yet

the coin must remain balanced for the person to remain fulfilled.

Although the reduction of an individuals' sexuality to physical behaviour is often

problematic, it is a technique or way of framing sexuality that seems to work for some

respondents. There is the implication that if we know what Adam is talking about with

regards to heterosexuality and homosexuality then we can understand what he means by

the term 'bisexual'. This was a large concern which the questionnaire attempted to address.

A series of questions were included to investigate whether respondents would separate

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[3] Gaydar (http://gaydar.co.uk/)- Is the UK's largest gay personals site.

their desire in this manner. I wanted to explore whether respondents saw their sexuality as divided into desire on numerous levels for a specific sex. Were respondents able to say they were more attracted to men and/or women on various levels, such as emotions, physicality and so forth? 36 of the 80 respondents stated that they were either more attracted to men or women. Of the male respondents (38 in total) 15 (39%) stated that they were more physically attracted to other men whilst 4 were attracted to women. It is possible that the remaining 19 of the 38 men (50%) did not want to define their sexuality in terms of physical attraction. However, 17 of these respondents also answered true/false to the statement suggesting that although respondents felt that they perhaps were more physically attracted to members of the same-sex for example. This suggests that the respondents were wary about defining their sexuality solely in terms of physical attraction. Female respondents mirrored this. Of the 42 female respondents 10 (24%) said they were more physically attracted to men, whilst 7 (17%) were more physically attracted to women. 19 of the entire female sample also chose to select that they would not define their sexuality solely in terms of physical attraction. 15 female respondents answered both that they were physically attracted to men/women and that they would not define their sexuality solely in terms of physical attraction. It is the case here that respondents felt that there were other aspects which were of more importance other than physical attraction. One example might be that a respondent didn't view their sexuality in terms of their physical attraction to a particular sex rather their emotional or even spiritual connection with a person. For example, one questionnaire respondent Elaine stated that she was bisexual because she could form spiritual connections with either men or women:

> For me it's being able to connect spiritually with someone, and it's of no concern what sex they are or what they even look like. I relate to people through my faith and it's that which draws me to people.

Quantitatively the other categories of attraction were less decisive and clear-cut however. For example, the respondents were not as willing to state that they were attracted emotionally towards men or women. Of the 38 men answering the question only 5 stated that they were more likely to have emotional involvement with women. Furthermore only 5 stated the same for men. This is paralleled by the female respondents of whom only 3 felt that were more likely to form an emotional bond with a man. However, one exception to this is the amount of women who stated that they were more able to form an emotional relationship with another woman. Of those 42 who answered the question 10 (almost 24%) said that it was more likely that they would have to be able to form an emotional attachment with another woman. This highlights once again a major finding within the data and one that rings true with contemporary research, particularly that of Diamond (2008). Women tend to be sexually more fluid than men and they do not seem to struggle as much changing from one sex of partner to the other. I will summarise Diamond's work at length because it is key to understanding my data here. Diamond argues that there are three reasons as to why women are able to be more sexually fluid. Firstly, there are two types of sexual arousal, proceptivity (or lust/libido- a hormone driven attraction) and arousability. Due to women's hormone cycles 'arousability has a greater day to day influence on female sexual desire than it does on male sexual desire' (Diamond 2008: 202). Secondly, evolution and the neurobiological mechanisms of romantic love suggests that love 'functions independently of sexual desire (ibid), 'can develop in the absence of sexual desire' and 'does not have an orientation in the same way that sexuality does (ibid)'. Put simply, it is

possible to fall in love with someone without being attracted to them. Finally and perhaps most importantly is the link between romantic love and sexual desire. Once romantic feelings are in place it would seem that sexual desire may develop from this.

But this does not mean that all women are potentially bisexual or sexual categorisation should be rejected. On the contrary this works hand-in-hand with one's sexual orientation but explains why we should not be so keen to reduce sexualities into broad categories:

> Once we abandon the notion that people must fall into neat categories when it comes to sexual desire and orientation, we might imagine hundreds of different subcategories representing different mixes of same-sex proceptivity and same-sex arousability. Importantly, individuals with predominantly heterosexual orientations but extremely high same-sex arousability are probably pretty rare, because very few social environments would be expected to provide so much access and positive re-inforcement of same-sex cues as to completely override an otherwise heterosexual orientation. (Diamond 2008:215)

There is a relation from these ideas to my data. There is certainly something different going on for female respondents compared to male respondents. The female respondents in the stories they told me were more flexible than the male respondents and understood their sexuality differently. Take for example the stories of Rose and Samantha:

> I think when you're talking about the differences between men and women who are bisexual...I can only talk from what's happened to me, but it wouldn't be an

overstatement to say it's hard for men. Sexual history seems to be a bigger issue for women, for men it's something a bit different...you know women are just different...it's easier to move in between people (Rose)

Rose suggests that women are more likely to not want to be involved with men who have had a non-heterosexual sexual history. Yet it is the final comment that is most interesting here when she suggests that women are somehow able to be more sexually fluid or flexible. This is something that most of the female interviewees discussed, particularly Samantha:

I think it is [bisexuality is different for women], there is certainly less stigma, but I'm not sure why that is. Perhaps we're less judgemental or something...I don't know it's just how we're brought up... (Samantha)

These cases do not seem to be isolated incidents as the quantitative data suggests that whereas male respondents had to create definitions which de-sexualise or re-align bisexuality within society, female respondents were free to construct more sexualised definitions. Put simply the male respondents tended to conceptualise their sexuality as a struggle which they tried to play down and to separate from their spirituality. One indicator of this could be that the female respondents were more willing to tell people of their sexuality, nine women were 'out' to everyone they knew (including religious community) compared to only three men. Another indicator is the fact that the female respondents' felt being out, although a private matter should be part of every aspect of your life, whereas the

male respondents' tended to take the view that as sexuality is personal it should stay that way.

What I do with others...sex...that's for me and for the people involved I cannot see how it is of concern to anyone. It doesn't need to be and for me, at my age it can cause more harm than good. (Daniel)

This is in stark contrast to the majority of the female respondents:

For me coming out wasn't a dramatic issue...I always knew about my sexuality but I never had actually come out. So I told my parents and they said OK that's fine, now what is for tea now. It wasn't a massive thing. Through my pastoral work I talk to people who battle and battle about coming out and accepting who they are, and I've never had a problem accepting who I am, my faith and sexuality and who I am are linked. (Cynthia)

These examples highlight the way the female respondents in particular demonstrate the flexible nature of bisexuality. Therefore it is important to explore how the respondents went beyond understanding bisexuality in terms of history, behaviour and attraction. This is the focus of the next section.

The data suggests that seeing bisexuality in terms of history, behaviour and attraction is rather reductive for some of the respondents. The respondents suggested that bisexuality was often based on a spiritual connection with another individual.

One questionnaire respondent, Jessica, had been living with her same-sex civil partner for over 7 years, yet had been celibate for most of her adult life. Jessica argues that her connection with her partner is spiritual first and foremost and this has developed into love and a strong relationship. Having lived with her partner for 5 years and had a civil partnership it is clear that she is in a committed and loving relationship. However, she connected with her partner on a spiritual level rather than needing to affirm her relationship with sexual relations. Therefore bisexuality is about being able to make connections with people of any sex and this is how she understands her own sexuality. Sexuality is about the ability to make meaningful connections which do not have to be sexual but are deep relationships. Therefore as a bisexual woman her sexuality enables her to connect with members of any sex. Bisexuality is moved away from a sexual behaviour towards a more free understanding with friendship playing a much more important role in sexuality.

This idea is furthered by Phillip a respondent who passionately spoke of bisexuality not in terms commonly associated with a form of sexuality (physical attraction, emotions, spirituality and so forth) but as the forming of companionships with people and creating lasting relationships.

...what it is all about is friendship, sex is there and then it's gone within half an hour or whatever, but friendship lasts a lifetime and that's been true in my lifetime. I'd rather have friends than have sex...because friends are there for me and sex can actually sour it. So gradually I've become more coherent about who I am and where I am [prompt regarding the relationship between bisexuality and friendship], it's a blurred line but at this time in my life I want close friendships with people and I'm bisexual. (Phillip)

This is however a very difficult issue and the obvious question that must be asked is if this is the case then where does one draw the line between sexuality and friendship if the defining act with regards to ones sexuality is not sex itself. This presents a difficultly within the study of human sexuality. Such a response clearly indicates a de-sexualisation of bisexuality or even sexuality in general as there seems to be a blurring of the boundaries between friend and partner. However, this is not as problematic as it first appears for two main reasons. Firstly, bisexuals who are not sexually active should not be confused with those who are asexual (of course neither should heterosexuals or homosexuals who are not sexually active). Secondly, the friendship that Phillip and Jessica talk off here is not the same as friendship as we commonly understand it. I will deal with these two ideas individually.

Not being sexuality active is not the same as asexuality. Not being sexually active would seem to suggest that there are other factors of attraction that are more important. Asexuality however, refers to a person who does not experience sexual attraction (AVEN 2009). Therefore accordingly it is likely that an individual who does not engage in sexual practice because they are asexual does so because of a lack of any sort of attraction to anybody. It is likely that asexual people are more challenging in regard to how we popularly understand love and attraction as they side-step the need for any sort of physical attraction.

Furthermore, this makes the term 'asexual bisexual' a linguistic nonsense. As Westphal suggests, 'Other asexuals might form a fourth category of sexual orientation in addition to the hetero-, homo- and bi-sexual ones, namely people who are attracted to neither gender, even if they have normal sex drives' (Westphal 2004)The key difference between those who are asexual and bisexuals who are celibate is that celibacy is done out of choice, whereas AVEN (2009) point out asexuals are naturally celibate. The respondents in my research who championed friendship over sexual behaviour still felt sexual attraction and physicality but were drawn to others differently, perhaps through a deep spiritual connection with another person or as it is often called a 'romantic attraction' (AVEN). The distinction that must be clearly made is that asexuals only experience this romantic attraction and the sexual attraction is absent. What we have in this scenario is a person who may or may not be sexually active but see other factors as more important.

The second point is that the respondents', when talking about the alignment between friendship and sexuality, were not using traditional models of friendship here. The friendship respondents talked about were relationships with people built upon things other than sexual intercourse, obviously, but they differed from the ways in scholars have understood friendships. Friendships are voluntary social engagements and according to Spencer and Pahl (2006) offer emotional involvement, practical support, and sociability. Yet they are also voluntary and seemingly fleeting relationships which can be quickly dropped if needed. As Bauman (2005:108) points out 'those self-same liquid and fast-flowing settings privilege those who can travel light; if changed circumstances require a fast move and starting anew from scratch long-term commitments and any ties difficult to untie may prove a cumbersome burden- ballast that needs to be thrown overboard'. Therefore friends who are easy to separate from are more desirable. The types of friendships respondents' discussed are similar to those researched by Spencer and Pahl (2006) and also

Pahl in his earlier work (2000) where friends take on the traditional role of the family. For a number of my respondents' close friendships were often a valid alternative to sexual relationships, so separating friends and potential partners becomes problematic. The key to differentiating factors between the two seems to be linked with a re-thinking about what it means to be in a relationship with somebody, what it means to be in love and also self-identitfication. Take for example the example of Jessica that I previously introduced, both partners get something from this relationship and they love each other on a level that is different from just friends. They give each other something different to their friends and they care about each other in a way that is not comparable to friends.

This section has shown that respondents pushed their own self-definitions beyond history, behaviour and attraction. In doing so they often created rather complex definitions which will be the focus of the next section.

Complex Definitions

From the data is seems it is unrealistic to view bisexuality in terms of equal splits of every possible form of attraction (physicality, emotion, spiritual and so forth), even though it is often an off the cuff remark to satisfy those who are curious:

I'm a number 4 [referring to the Kinsey scale], I'm bi and I prefer sex with other men, that's what I tell people who don't really want to listen (Jim)

Yet to make things more complex researchers have attempted to produce an exhaustive list of what sexuality means and then to measure it in terms of same-sex and opposite sex attraction. The Klein Sexual Orientation Grid (Klein 1993) is the best example of this and he suggests that there are differing factors to take into consideration when determining sexuality. It is more often than not, unfair to reduce an individual's sexuality to simply what they do physically.

As discussed in the literature review (Chapter 2) Klein lists seven main categories: Sexual attraction, sexual behaviour, sexual fantasies, emotional preference, social preference, lifestyle preference and self-identification (Klein 1993). These categories are then rated one to six as with the Kinsey scale to produce a score. This is a more complex definition which to some extent the respondents took on board. Although, as I will discuss, Klein does not go far enough, to some degree the majority of the respondents would defined their sexuality in these sorts of terms. Namely, bisexuality is about the seven categories that Klein sets out. Most importantly, unlike Klein the respondents showed that all of these factors do not have to be present and furthermore they do not have to be split between male and female attraction evenly. An individual for example, could only be suited to men in one of the seven categories and still be bisexual. Klein does allow for change within the time-scales asking respondents to insert scores for the past, the present and ideal.

Although such a scale is more thorough, it does not fully represent my sample. In practical terms respondents lives do not reflect such an even split, such a neat 50/50 split was not evident in the data. For example in order to be bisexual using such measurement one would need to score around 3-4 for each category on each time-scale. In practice this would not happen. Take for example the life story of Adam a 63 year-old man who was married until a few years ago and is now in a same-sex relationship. In terms of both

behaviour and history Adam has been almost exclusively heterosexual yet he is bisexual. Using a model similar to Klein's, Adam's sexuality would perhaps be more likely to be regarded as homosexual in that the present and ideal will indicate homosexuality but with him being historically heterosexual. Ruth a 27 year-old Catholic had been in a relationship with her male partner for over 4 years and had lived together for 2 and a half years, she describes her same-sex experiences as fumbles (during her time at University). Yet Ruth calls herself bisexual. Emotionally and physically both in terms of past and present it could be suggested that she is heterosexual yet this does not fit Ruth's own idea of her sexuality, as she continues to self-identify as bisexual. There are countless other examples of this. These have been selected at random from the data-set: Catrina a 22 year old from the Midlands, is single and has never been sexually active, she is intentionally celibate and does not attempt to classify her attraction sexual or otherwise. Denise is a 19 year old woman who has been with her heterosexual male partner for 6 months. She has never been sexually involved with a woman or felt the emotional pull to be so but refuses to close off this possibility in the future because she is physically attracted to members of the same-sex and often feels a spiritual connection with her close friends.

These stories show that it is simply inaccurate to say that definitions of bisexuality are solely based upon the degree to which an individual is attracted to a member of a particular sex and whether they are attracted to both sexes in equal measure. For example, although respondents often stated they were attracted to both sexes this does not mean that they were on average equally attracted to both sexes.

It would seem from the data that although there are some key indicators for measuring human sexuality (which Klein and others formulated) certain categories seem to carry more weight than others. It is apparent from the data that most often the defining reason that respondents saw themselves as bisexual was that it was the label that they felt

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fit best. Therefore, self-identification holds far more influence over whether an individual is bisexual or otherwise. The example of Alfred is most poignant here. As a 72 year old man Alfred had lived a very full life, living in numerous countries and having partners of either sex, although always monogamously. Yet it was only during the last couple of years that he accepted the term bisexual and settled upon this. Although almost exclusively homosexual in sexual behaviour Alfred identifies as bisexual because it seems to fit with his overall examination of his own life retrospectively and looking to the future. He craves the company of people and wants to experience even more and to talk to people from different backgrounds.

> What I would like is a Christian group, with gay, bisexual and lesbian women in...some in long term relationships, two chaps living together, 2 women or a man and a woman...to understand what it's like for other people in my situation and what they do. (Alfred)

Although this does not strictly seem like a self-definition as such it is showing that Alfred defines himself as the creator of his own sexuality giving his thoughts and experiences a name. For him sexuality is something that is intertwined with life experiences and the situations you find yourself in have an impact upon your sexuality. Through this experiential knowledge he identifies himself as bisexual. Alfred's self definition is rather more complex than a simple off the cuff remark about his attraction. The following quotation makes this somewhat clearer:

I don't really know what it [bisexuality] means...what does it mean? [he pauses but continues]...it's the only way that I can describe how I am with people and what I've done and seen in my life, people need to be more open...but I still cannot imagine a female partner after...my sexual history.

It is very difficult to force some sort of definition upon Alfred as he could not formulate one himself or had not reached a firm understanding of what his sexuality meant to him apart from being a cause of confusion and turmoil in relation to his spirituality. From a simplistic perspective Alfred appears to be bisexual because of his sexual history and attraction but underlying this is a more flexible idea about the nature of sexuality with specific regard to bisexuality. Namely that bisexuality somehow opens up sexual doors and is the key to liberation in terms of sexuality and gender. Bisexuality is often seen as flexible and malleable as the following section will discuss.

Bisexuality and Flexibility

The flexibility of bisexuality in relation to gender is something that the majority of the respondents felt was integral to what it meant to be bisexual. Also the general flexibility of bisexuality was generally revered. When presented with the statement 'bisexuality allows you to fit into heterosexual and homosexual communities' almost 39% stated that they either agree or strongly agree with the statement, 26% of the respondents were unsure. Such statistics are not conclusive as 34% actually disagree or strongly disagree. However, the quotations from Samantha and Rose uncover a complexity to the issue. The idea that bisexual people define as bisexual because they are an even balance of masculinity and

femininity is not supported by the data. Although the example of Richard is rather striking it appears to be a curious exception. Gender is vitally important in how respondent's framed their sexuality because as Rose suggests bisexual desire is often gendered (e.g. one is attracted to a person because they act in a gendered way) and as Samantha suggests gender is something that is constantly negotiated because bisexuals are outside of the masculine/feminine and heterosexual/homosexual binaries which are so important in organising society (at least in modern Western life). There appear to be two main issues regarding the role of gender in the lives of bisexual individuals and two conflicting ideas as to why it is so important. Firstly, the idea that bisexual desire in gendered and that self-definitions of bisexuality are built around the idea that bisexuality is about being attracted to any sex of person, with these attractions being formulated around gender. Secondly, that gender is something considered simply because it is so prevalent throughout society. These issues must be considered in greater detail and this is the focus of the following section.

Gender and Bisexuality

There are two dimensions to gender and attraction which I have distinguished: gendered attraction and gender specific attraction. Here I will begin by firstly explaining what these concepts mean.

Gendered attraction is the attraction to individual's gendered characteristics, traits or mannerisms for example which are seen as masculine/male. Examples might be such simple things as old-fashioned romantic behaviour or men taking a more dominant role. Gendered attraction is simply an attraction to masculinity or femininity which is not mutually exclusive to a person's sex. Gender specific attraction on the other hand refers to

attraction towards characteristic borne out of the sex of the individual. Examples could be broad shoulders on men, the female form for instance. Stereotypical images which are re-enforced throughout our daily lives through magazines and advertising. Put simply, it is the attraction to a person's physicality of their sex. These often work concurrently but not always. This opens up several sets of respondent definitions. Firstly respondents who defined their sexuality as an attraction to members of either sex, yet this attraction was dependent upon fulfilling requirements in terms of gendered attraction and gender specific attraction. Conversely there are those for whom gender is of no concern, individuals who seem to reject gender as a basis for attraction. There is also, more difficultly, those who seem to need one but not the other. There are examples throughout the research of respondents who did this.

Delilah was a female respondent who had never really confirmed her same-sex attraction through some sort of sexual behaviour but does not feel the need to prove that she is indeed bisexual. It is she who had the power and confidence to call herself bisexual (as previously discussed). Yet this is often combined with an active challenge to what it means to be attracted to other people. The respondents often made the claim that the biological sex or indeed gender make-up is not a barrier for relationships, nor is it a defining feature. This quotation from Stuart acts as a summary with regards to the idea that gender doesn't matter in choosing one's partner.

> I am bisexual which means to me that gender is not a barrier to physical attraction, having sexual relations, and emotional attachment. I do not possess a finite amount of attraction that must be carefully portioned out to each gender in a calculated proportion. The idea of being 'more' attracted to one gender or another doesn't really make sense to me in my experience. I am bisexual. Gender is not a barrier to sexual attraction for me as

it is for other people. I would be happy to fall in love, marry, and be monogamous for life with someone of either gender. (Stuart)

The rejection of gendered (or gender specific) attraction idea has been the focus of lively debate between scholars and has provided some radical new theories. There were respondents' who pushed this premise further to suggest that because bisexual individuals have this ability, bisexuality holds the key to sexual and gender fluidity and obtaining some truth about human sexuality. The division between theorists however, is evident. Rust for example in her extensive research argues:

> Most commonly, bisexuality is seen as a challenge to the central importance of gender in defining sexual orientation. Heterosexuality and homosexuality are defined in relation to gender; heterosexuality is sexuality experienced between other-gendered individuals and homosexuality is sexuality between same-gendered individuals...But some bisexual-identified individuals object to the reification of gender implicit in this conception of bisexuality, asserting that their own sexuality is not a combination of sexuality-toward-men and sexuality-toward-women but a sexuality in which others' genders are irrelevant or incidental. (Rust 2000:221)

Such a strong standpoint is taken further by Garber who argues that because of this movement away from gendered attraction bisexuality becomes rather radical and a challenging identity to adopt:

It is an identity that is not an identity, a sign of the certainty of ambiguity, the stability of instability, a category that defines and defeats categorization. (Garber 2000:70).

Garber here talks of the destabilizing nature of bisexuality and the threat it poses to the categorization of sexuality. However, Garber is not particularly clear on why or how it poses such a threat, relying upon the assertion that because bisexuality is not constrained to the usual forces of gender that it has free reign. I use the literature here to clarify the point I am attempting to make. Bisexuality potentially seems to question the role of gender in relationships and society in general. From my data it would appear that in the first instance the threat comes from the rejection of gender specific attraction. Or put simply, people who are attracted to other attributes rather than the sex of the person in question. For example, a heterosexual man might be interested in a member of the opposite sex because of several key facial and bodily attributes. Basing attraction not on these physical attributes (such as sex for example) suggests that bisexual individuals use other methods to select partners and the initiation of relationships may not occur primarily on the basis of a person's sex. There are other characteristics which lead to a personal connection such as spiritual compatibility, shared interests, sense of humour. The persons' sex is simply one of these characteristics and carries no more weight. Therefore the overall ethos of this idea could be that these respondents fall in love with the person rather than the sex of the person. Such sentiment is echoed throughout the data:

It's...just fall[ing] for the person...it's the only way I can describe it to you. It's about being open to people and getting to know people on a greater level... (Elanor)

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But as I say it's not about the sex of the person, just the person themselves and whether I connect with them and for me the connection is spiritual. If we connect spirituality that is most important. (Cynthia)

Also individuals may be consciously aware that they are making distinctions. Serena a 45 year-old, who regularly attends a Russian Orthodox Church considered her own attraction:

I am a married bisexual woman whose main attraction is to other women – on an emotional, spiritual, physical level. I have had relationships with both sexes but would say that my relationships with women are on all levels deeper, more fulfilling. I can feel physically attracted to men and enjoy having a sexual relationship but that's usually short-lived and not on an emotionally deep level. I am reasonably certain that if was starting my life all over again, I would chose to be with another woman (and probably still define as bi but not be in a primary relationship with a man). As it stands, I have no intention of ending my marriage (that's where the spirituality comes in…), and causing unnecessary hurt.

Here there is an acknowledgement that some types of attraction may be more important. In this case it appears that Serena is saying a more fulfilled relationship exists due to an emotional, spiritual and physical connection, although she has been able to be in a long-term committed opposite-sex relationship. In reality it is often more difficult than claiming to fall in love with the person.

For lesbian feminists the idea that gender does not matter or plays little importance in life is very problematic as Jeffrey's clearly summarises:

It is precisely the determination to choose partners 'regardless of gender' that lesbian feminists find very strange, since we specifically choose women for their "difference" from men. Women and men do, after all, occupy different power positions within male supremacist society, which are likely to influence how they have learned to behave and what rights and privileges they can expect. (Jeffreys 1999:279)

This coincides with Delilah's statement:

It's so difficult, because if I'm in a relationship with a girl I generally miss all the things, you know, guy things. But if I'm with a guy I miss the girl things. It's all very...it's just different ways of relating to each other. But then maybe I just date stereotypical guys and girls... I think if I met the right person it wouldn't matter, and that's the main thing, if you meet the right person it doesn't matter if they are a guy or a girl, I can be attracted to both. And I need to be honest for my own peace of mind.

This is perhaps an unsolvable quandary as to why some bisexual people can live without being involved with both sexes, yet others cannot. This will be further discussed in the following section, but suffice to say there is a constant grinding between theory and practice. Yet what seems to be important is that the claim to side-step gender is a very contentious one and has been criticised by feminists such as Jeffery's in the above

quotation and also Wilkinson (1996) who argues that bisexuals in many ways are abandoning the cause. She argues that the idea that one falls for the person rather than the gender seems to go against the whole plight of (lesbian) feminism and the journey towards equality. If the claim truly is that it's the person that one falls in love with then such a claim seems rather naive and ignorant towards the working of patriarchy in society. Yet as Wilkinson points out it is often the presentation of bisexuality as depoliticised trend-setting, of "anything goes" sexual hedonism, which glosses over the specificities of bisexual desire, activity and identity, presenting it as little more than a marketing exercise' (Wilkinson 1995:299). Wilkinson is suggesting that there is a fine line between claiming to fall for the person and sexual hedonism, there needs to be care about how bisexuality is presented.

Jim, a Methodist from the Staffordshire area continues the idea that the sex of the other person(s) is not the defining feature:

> Yeah there were certain things about either sex that I'd find attractive by looking at people, and they were specifically aimed at a certain sex. So this developed towards the end of my High school time, but I guess that's why I'm monogamous, I don't need to have both sexes because I get enough from whoever I am with...that perhaps sounds a bit selfish doesn't it, I don't mean it like that...(long pause) I guess I mean I'm just happy with who I am with at the moment, I don't pine for a person, you know...of the different sex from what I am with at the time. There are other things that are attractive about a person rather than genitalia.

Yet Jim here, perhaps unknowingly hits upon a rather difficult paradox which raises a taxing question. If the sex of an individual is not an issue for bisexuals, do the respondents find particular aspects of femininity and masculinity attractive on men and/or women? Furthermore do they miss these aspects? I have argued before (Toft 2000) that in theory bisexuals have argued that gender is simply another characteristic of a persons' makeup or completely rejected, but on a practical level this is not completely realistic. In a Western society in which images of beauty are instilled from an early age and are very much part of our cultural make-up, it would seem rather unlikely that it would be possible for some people to side-step gendered beauty. Here I am referring to gendered stereotypes which exist such as feminine curves in women and broad shoulders in men. Is it realistic to say that bisexual individuals have no consideration what is attractive for men and women?

Such questions have potentially radical implications. The section now moves to explore some of these implications.

Radical Implications

The idea that bisexuality can potentially revolutionise how would we understand human sexuality runs throughout the data. The respondents themselves often make this connection but it is a conclusion that I have drawn from their stories. Rose in her interview talked about how she understood her own attraction:

> I'm sure on some level I do make decisions about the way people look and what people are like...I wouldn't...it sounds rather bad of me to say...I want a man who is different

from me, someone strong and you know manly. I don't think it's wrong of me to want that...(Rose)

Once more, respondents argued that appearances were just one aspect of whether a relationship is possible, as they had done with gender or sex. This is a rather radical idea which is very difficult for non-bisexual individuals to grasp. Such an idea goes against the presupposition that sexual/physical attraction is the main factor with regards to sexual relations. The suggestion is that individuals do not bond with each other and then feel a sexual attraction based upon how the person looks and how you feel towards them; rather sexual relations take part solely upon how you feel about the person. It is more likely that the individuals who talk about their bisexuality in this manner are remarkable people and not typical within the study.

Theoretically, this more radical formation of bisexuality seems to propose that because bisexuality is not bound by binary models of sexuality in that it is not formed in relation to homosexuality and heterosexuality- bisexuality is not about being a combination of these two. Furthermore, it does not refer to a gender position, someone for example, who has both masculine and feminine traits. Therefore bisexuality is a completely different form of sexuality. It is a completely different form of sexuality unique from any other. This standpoint has been raised by many important theorists. Both Sturgis, (1996:44) and Ka'ahu-manu (1995:64) argue that bisexuality has the power to disrupt the very fabric upon which our ideas on human sexuality are built, as Sturgis suggests bisexuality has "the potential to disrupt the very structure of oppression," (Sturgis 1996:44). Rust (1995) clearly has uncovered this thread also:

If bisexuality poses a challenge to dichotomous gender, then it follows that one might adopt a bisexual identity as a way to protest dichotomous gender and oppressions that are based on gender. In other words, bisexuality can be seen not only as consistent with the political goal of dismantling gender, but as a means towards that goal. (Rust 1995:242)

This idea presented itself in my data. There is a definite streak in the data which regards bisexuality as both a political tool and a revolutionary sexual identity. Here we have individuals who see their sexuality not as a core identity or something very personal and diverse but as a means to an end. For example, during the questionnaire stage respondents were asked to explain their sexuality in terms of: physical attraction and actual physical behaviour or to state that it was impossible to describe their sexuality in those terms. 56% of respondents refused to answer the question in terms of sexual behaviour. Of these 20% stated that doing so was understating the role of the sexuality, arguing that for them sexuality was 'something more'. For clarity some examples of this standpoint are as follows:

Nicola a 20 year old female stated clearly:

Bisexuality is about breaking down the boundaries between sexualities and what it means to be a man and woman.

She continues in a later part of the questionnaire:

Bisexuality can be about more than any of this [referring to the sexual behaviour question], and it's about more than just sexuality, we can relate to more people because of it and it can stop such discrimination... (Nicola)

This radical understanding supports the claim that bisexuality is like a missing link which sits upon the sexuality continuum and negotiates problems and difficulties between heterosexuals and homosexuals (Rust 1995). Bisexuality sits in-between both heterosexuality and homosexuality and femininity and masculinity whilst transcending them both.

However in practice this more radical formation of bisexuality is a little problematic and rather severe for many of the respondents. This is also very evident in the literature, particularly the work of the Bi Academic Intervention, led by Merl Storr. This group of academics has out rightly denied the radical implications of bisexuality:

Thus Bi Academic Intervention actively does not want bisexuality to be seen as (Rust 1995; p.259) 'the final revolution in the wheel of sexual identity politics'- we simply do not believe that bisexuality is radical enough, or politically and conceptually pure enough, to effect that kind of change. (Storr 1997:3. Reference style in original)

It continues:

> We don't make the grandiose kinds of claims about this special issue that we criticise others for making about bisexuality: we don't expect it to change the world. (Storr 1997:7)

The underlying point seems to be that bisexuality itself and the politicisation of bisexuality is too problematic for it to be a solution to the problem (ibid). The quantitative data tends to support this in the diversity of the sample. If bisexuality is going to challenge binary heterosexist society then it would need a united voice. If there is one thing that this chapter shows it is that bisexuality as a concept has very little unity or over-arching definition.

Furthermore, this sort of argument has meant bisexual theory has received much unwanted attention mainly from lesbian feminists and gay activists, particularly Jonathan Dollimore (1996). Dollimore finds the perspective that the true nature of bisexuality is the ascendancy from gendered life troublesome, focussing upon human desire and what he considers to be a paradox. He argues that bisexuality as a means of transcending gender order cannot work because of basic principles of attraction. Using the example of a pornographic film Dollimore argues that for the bisexual individual observing heterosexual intercourse, a paradox is raised, as a bisexual individual desires both to be penetrated and to be the one doing the penetrating (Dollimore 1996). Therefore making bisexual desire unworkable at a very basic level. This however highlights a male-centric bias to Dollimore's work as it is clear that such a response is written with only male bisexuals in mind, as it is not physically possible for a female bisexual to penetrate. Furthermore, is it not possible that a bisexual man only wants to penetrate whether his partner is a woman or a man? The assertion that bisexuals need to both be penetrated and to penetrate assumes that this is

necessary in order to be bisexual. Individual sexual preference means that it is entirely possible for a bisexual man not to want to do both. Also, it is surely possible for a bisexual woman to enjoy being penetrated by a man and not to want to penetrate at all. The focus this paradox does not allow for individual sexual preference.

Dollimore's focus here is very much upon keeping bisexuality away from postmodern discourse, and like the Bi Academic Intervention realising the limits of bisexuality.

A response to such accusations has been to discuss bisexuality in terms of simple catch-all type definitions. The following section now takes this approach.

Simple Definitions

As my interviewees often articulated, creating grand ways of defining bisexuality was often unhelpful. Most respondents adopted a position that their sexuality was simply learnt behaviour and down to the process of socialisation:

> ...bisexuality is not about promiscuity and the Church misunderstands what it means to be a bisexual Christian. I have loving relationships monogamously…perhaps it is easier for me to reconcile this in this way because I'm playing at being heterosexual in this way (long pauses). It's not about being free to do whatever you like, breaking down boundaries of injustice and gender relations (laughs). I've just learnt somehow that I'm attracted to both sexes and it's just me (Michael).

This approach resonates to ideas formulated by Rust (2000). Here the focus is upon not limiting ones potential sexually in terms of partners. Rust summarises:

> ...one thing is abundantly clear from current findings: despite the fact that many individuals might have inferred their capacity to be attracted to both women and men or their willingness to have sexual contact or relationships with either women or men from their previous experiences or behaviours, it is their perception that they remain *capable* of feelings for and/or sexual contacts with both women and men- not the fact that they have had such feelings and experiences- that is central to their conceptions of themselves as bisexuals. (Rust 2000:228- emphasis original)

This seems to be an excellent working definition of bisexuality the *potential* to be involved with either/both sexes and fits with the majority of my respondents. It includes those who have never been sexual with a particular (if any) sex. Rather it is the knowledge that in the future this may occur. Let us consider the life-story of Jim, a Methodist from the Staffordshire area of England who seems to embody this sort of understanding. Jim is 26 and currently with his opposite-sex partner of two years. They do not live together but he is open about his sexuality and is committed to monogamous relationships. He works full-time and describes his life as 'normal' and uses phrases such as the 'same as everyone else really'. Jim's sexuality means that he could possibly be involved in a relationship with a man or a woman. He is attracted to women who are fit the stereotypical image of women and men who do like-wise.

Yeah there were certain things about either sex that I'd find attractive by looking at people, and they were specifically aimed at a certain sex. So this developed towards the end of my High school time, but I guess that's why I'm monogamous, I don't need to have both sexes because I get enough from whoever I am with...that perhaps sounds a bit selfish doesn't it, I don't mean it like that...(long pause) I guess I mean I'm just happy with who I am with at the moment, I don't pine for a person, you know...of the different sex from what I am with at the time. (Jim)

Jim's sexuality is both gender and sex aware. He potentially could be in a relationship with members of either sex, as long as they meet his criteria. Rust however, with her formulation of this definition has to be careful of her use of words here as which although seem interchangeable, can have further implications. The term 'potential' for example is rather close to 'ability' and perhaps suggests that bisexual individuals are somehow better or more evolved than monosexuals. There are definite Utopian overtones to such a standpoint which seems to suggest bisexuality is something for everyone to aim for. However, this is perhaps unfair towards Rust as her use of the term 'potential' is an attempt to distance identity from behaviour. In that her respondents discussed their sexual selves in relation to what they thought rather than what they did. Yet even such a broad and wide-ranging definition could be met with resistance as Rust points out. The very conceptualising and defining of bisexuality could potentially be exclusionary:

...becoming a player in ethnic-style sexual identity politics means defining the boundary that separates those who belong to the population from those who don't that is defining bisexuality. This, in turn, would merely reconstruct the sexual landscape and perpetuate sexual oppression in a slightly altered form; the bisexual category, like the lesbian, gay and

heterosexual categories, would become part of the oppressive structure awaiting the next generation of sex rebels. (Rust 2000:229)

Rust is aware (as am I) of the damage that could occur by creating strict definitions. My respondents' were also aware of the potential limitations in defining sexuality in rigid terms as most preferred to talk of their sexuality in terms of a life journey or an on-going project. Alfred, whose difficulties I have discussed is an example of this as he would not talk about his sexuality in any real detail. Apart from the fact that, as I suggested, he had a rather flexible notion of human sexuality he would not tie his sexuality down because it was in a constant state of flux. Not only, as Rust argues, does defining exclude people who would like to define as bisexual but it is possibly an unrealistic task if we view human sexuality as fluid and flexible, particularly over periods of time.

The point about bisexuality being diverse cannot be downplayed. For example, using the data from the questionnaire data a picture of difference and non-correlation appears when looking at how respondents defined their own sexuality, as has been discussed throughout this section. There are examples of bisexuality being a rejection of gendered schemes, and examples of it being nothing to do with gender. Of bisexuality being a combination of heterosexual and homosexual desire, and examples of it being a distinct and different sexual identity. All I hope to have done here is highlighted the various schools of thought.

The refusal to offer any clear definition has been adopted by several contemporary writers, either playfully or completely seriously (see Angelides 2001). Such an approach seems like a response to the complex nature of bisexuality, for example, respondents being unable to fully articulate what they mean. From the data it is clear that

respondents found it difficult to self define their sexuality because to do so was to simply describe them. In other words, their sexuality was so core to their being, speaking of it in such abstract terms made no sense.

> ...then something did happen, it was a bit of a drunken night but it happened and I didn't stop it. I wanted it, I'm sure of that at least…it didn't feel like it was wrong or anything…it was just being sexual. That's what my sexuality is...it's just me being sexual and describe it is hard. (Jim)

This was also evident among the female respondents:

> I really try not to label myself because I don't want to put myself into a box, even though people do want me to be in a box. I try to stay away from that as a spiritual person. I'm living with a woman but we can sometimes limit ourselves by not connecting by people of the same-sex, we don't want to be in a box that other people put us in. My sexuality is part of me as a spiritual person...we waste so much time put labels on people, why do we have to say that we are bisexual?...We are just sexual beings and what we do with that sexuality is dependent on the set of circumstances that we are in. (Cynthia)

However, it is also apparent that there is a conscious effort to reduce the inclusiveness of bisexuality as Rust suggests and also to refuse to be drawn into a political struggle. Conversely however, this has resulted in invisibility with regards to the issues

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facing bisexual individuals. As Roberts (1997:67) points out with such a focus upon diversity it is a surprise that any bisexual communities have appeared at all.

Although not knowingly, the respondents used scales or models which are present in the work of Kinsey (1948) and Klein (1993). This reflects difficulty that they had in getting across precisely what it meant to be bisexual without referring to heterosexuality and homosexuality. This is an idea that I will explore throughout the remainder of this section.

What is perhaps surprising is that respondents' in the quantitative stage of the research did not give much credence to the idea that sexuality is defined by one's behaviour solely. Such a suggestion was greeted with disdain and something that was explored in the interview stage. Jim, a Methodist from the Midlands stated:

If sexuality was just about who you had sex with or who you wanted to have sex with then I'm not sure what would happen...I mean I've only really had sex with girls and I have no idea what will happen in the future. It's more difficult than this.

This rather simplistic definition of bisexuality has its roots in the work of the sex scientists and particularly the work of Alfred Kinsey (1948). It can be summarised neatly that this school of thought understands bisexuality as a combination of heterosexuality/homosexuality or a combination of maleness and femaleness and the driving force behind what sexuality is appears to be behaviour and action. An individual is bisexual for example, because s/he has sex with members of both sexes. Kinsey argued (1948) that human sexuality was best described using his scale which had several points

relating to peoples sexuality. Zero representing exclusively heterosexual and six representing exclusively homosexual, as has been discussed in depth during the literature review (see Chapter 2).

> I've had relationships and sex with both men and women and for some people that is enough, that is what it boils down to. Actually putting your ideas into practice and going and doing it… (Michael)

Even though he admits its reductive nature, for Michael the act of sex turns ideas into reality and confirms partners as partners and not simply friends or associates. There are some further problems with the Kinsey style definition. Firstly, to some degree, most of the population- in terms of thoughts and behaviour- could be seen as bisexual because in reality according to Kinsey, people who would measure zero or six on the scale are rare. Secondly, using Kinsey's scale to measure human sexuality re-enforces the binaries of heterosexual and homosexual as complete opposites. It is therefore impossible to measure bisexuality without saying for instance Adam (to use my example) is 50% heterosexual and 50% homosexual. There cannot be a strong and distinct bisexual identity if bisexuality is simply seen as heterosexuality and homosexuality combined. This furthers the assertion that bisexuality is not distinct and unique and opens the possibility and suggestion that in fact everyone must be potentially bisexual. The more radical respondents' for example often discussed bisexuality in terms of a 'natural' state of human sexuality:

...its [bisexuality] you know, probably what we all are really if you get rid of the way people are taught to be. But it's messy and it isn't neat and perhaps doesn't really work in our way of life (Michael)

Even during the initial questionnaire stage this sort of argument was clear. Matthew, when attempting to define his sexuality stated:

I am bisexual and I need to have relationships with both men and women at the same time. I guess I have been lucky that my wife allows this. Although I feel and think she understands that everyone is bisexual anyway.

However, in practice this is simply not reflected in the life stories of the respondents who in general fit a rather traditional life style. Instances such as Matthew above are very uncommon and even in his life his partners are a heterosexual woman and a homosexual man which seems to go against his personal philosophy of sexual fluidity.

For my respondents using models like the Kinsey scale was clearly a useful way of understanding their own sexuality. Although the use of such scales is problematic, as I have argued in the literature review (see Chapter 2), using models allowed respondents' to describe their sexuality. Most of the respondents' were well-read and understood to a basic level the key theories with regard to bisexuality. Those who weren't aware of such theories talked about their sexuality in this manner also.

Kinsey's contemporaries (such as Ellis 1975) did not separate sexuality from gender and gave an account of bisexuality as someone confused about whether they are

masculine (men) or feminine (women). In these essentialist writings it was presumed that sexuality was ascribed at birth, or 'inborn' to use the terminology of Ellis (1975). Indeed, for sex scientists such as Ellis opposites attract and male inverts (feminine men) are attracted to masculine men. Using case-studies Ellis attempted to show that this is indeed the case. Ellis however hints that the ability to display both masculine and feminine traits suggests a complex mind and an ability to exercise divination (Ellis 1975). Although Ellis is almost certainly incorrect in his linking of sexuality and gender (as discussed in the literature review), it is fascinating to note the formation of the idea that because bisexuality combines masculinity and femininity it is somehow more advanced than heterosexuality and homosexuality.

Richard a 45 year-old man from Surrey discussed this:

But I'm not a Church leader, and I wasn't that good a missionary when I did that. But I'm good as a carer because I am using my bisexuality, my female persona at times as a God-given gift and then at times I will use my male side. (Richard)

Here Richard is suggesting that his bisexuality actually helps in his day to day life because of the way it enables him to interact with people of different sexes. Richard is suggesting that bisexuality as well as being a combination of heterosexual and homosexual desire is a mixture of both masculinity and femininity. For him bisexuality is about playing with one's gender, about being fluid and flexible about preconceptions of what it means to be 'manly' or 'womanly'. He easily frames this by talking about his 'sides', a masculine side

and a feminine side which work together and alternate their prominence. Richard is therefore making the link between biological sex and a persons' gender. This seems to go against most current trends within sociological research but is consistent with Storr's (1999) typology of research into bisexuality. Particularly the school of social constructionism informed by the work of Foucault, as outlined in the literature review. Weeks (2003) particularly undermines Richard's idea that as a bisexual man his gender make up is equally masculine and feminine.

The linking of gender with bisexuality ran deep throughout the respondents however and they were often less keen to discard the idea so easily. A small amount of the respondents stated that for them bisexuality was indeed related to their gender make-up. Of those taking part in the interview stage two female respondents, Rose and Samantha had considered this idea:

I think that talking about whether someone is manly or...girly, it's to do with whether I'm attracted to them or not. Like I said before...I want a man who is like a man, all the normal assumptions [prompted about her own gender make-up] but I'm different (laughs)...Being bisexual lets you be both and move between them. (Rose)

When I used the same line of questioning towards Samantha:

The different position that I find myself in is being able to adapt in terms of whether I'm more of a feminine or a bit more butch. I think that everyone has the potential to do it

but being bisexual makes it stand out and means that you have to do it a lot

more...(Samantha)

This shows that such essentialised understanding of gender still play an important role in the lives of the respondents. It was often the case however that what they did, do or are thinking of doing influenced the respondents most, this will be the focus of the next section.

MAKING SENSE OF SUCH INDIVIDUALISED ACCOUNTS

Having presented such an exploratory account of the respondents' sexualities the chapter now attempts to make sense of what these mean. Taking the discussion from the previous section the focus is upon neatly summarising these complex ideas. The research has found that bisexuality is diverse but there are common features which work together. Put simply, bisexuality has multiple definitions and layers, but there are characteristics which work together. By looking at the stories the respondents told me there are numerous things that respondents thought were important in informing their sexuality. Table 1 presents the dimensions that the respondents told me were important in shaping their sexuality:

Table 1: Dimensions that make up bisexuality

Dimension that makes up bisexuality	Explanation
Sexual Behaviour	The behaviour they currently enact.
Sexual History	Their history in terms of relationships and intimate relationships.
Relationships and relationship types	How many partners people have and how relationships are managed.
Emotional attraction	Being attracted on an emotional level.
Physical attraction	Being attracted to physicality (often gendered).
Spiritual attraction	Being attracted to a person's spiritual make-up.
Other qualities of attraction	Examples might include sense of humour, political views.
The role of friendship	As discussed friendship is seen by many of the respondents as vital to their sexuality.
Balancing masculinity and femininity	Desiring a person who is a balance (50/50) of masculinity and femininity.
Gender and its flexibility	Attraction to people who are a certain gender or can play with gender- Including androgyny. There can also be a rejection of the importance of gender as a defining characteristic for attraction.
Fantasy	Sexual fantasy or any other fantasy regarding lifestyle.
Self-identification	The most important- Stating that one is indeed bisexual.
Politics	Seeing bisexuality as a force for change in regards to how society understands sexuality.

What is important is that fact that each of these carries different weight for

different individuals. It is also important to note that this list may not be exhaustive, but it

is the list that has been assembled from the data I collected. Furthermore it is also common

for some traits to be grouped together more frequently. For example the respondents who placed most importance on their sexual history also tended to place more emphasis on their sexual behaviour and the type of relationships they engage in. Another example is those who place more emphasis on gender, these respondents also tend to focus upon other forms of attraction and talk about the more radical implications of bisexuality. However, this is as far and I will reduce the data. The accounts of bisexuality are individual with varying different weightings for each aspect which contributes to sexuality. Such factors do not need to be exclusively bisexual of course, but it seems unlikely that someone would define themselves as heterosexual because they believe heterosexuality is about maintaining sexual binarism, such issues are of less importance. Previous research has suggested that bisexuality is about being attracted to members of the opposite sex or people of a certain gender makeup (McLean 2007:155). Others have argued that it is in fantasy that someone can become bisexual whilst appearing to be bisexual (Klein 1993:21). Klein (1993) has also suggested that it could be to do with the way that individuals organise their relationships: Sequential- having relationships with men and women but one after the other. Concurrent- having relationships with men and women at the same time. Episodic or temporary- flirting with the idea and occasionally having brief encounters with members of either sex. Situational- depending upon the opportunities presented to an individual, such as a historically heterosexual person having homosexual relationships in prison. What I am saying it all of these are valid definitions. However, some of these definitions may be more important than others; they all carry different weights for different individuals.

UNDERSTANDING THE RESPONDENTS' RELIGIOUS FAITH

The chapter now moves to explore how the respondents, as bisexual individuals, understood their faith. It is necessary, first of all, to be clear what respondents are referring to when they talk about Christianity. Only when it is understood what the respondents are referring to in regards to their faith can we look at how their sexuality affects their religious faith and how their religious faith affects their sexuality. The previous section clarified what the respondents' meant by bisexuality and the diverse ways that bisexuality is understood. Here the focus is upon what they mean when they talk about their religious faith with the spotlight upon the internalisation of their faith and what the respondents believe in, moving to look at the societal impact upon their faith. This has far reaching implications such as the role that Christianity plays in their lives and how they understand the world. The aim here is to present a picture of what Christianity does for the respondents and what it does in their lives. Put simply, what does it mean to self-identify as Christian?

After exploring what it means to be a Christian there will be an exploration of the role of denomination in the lives of the respondents and the importance of denominational affiliation. The important question here is whether belonging to a particular denomination affected the respondents understanding of Christianity significantly. As with the previous section the central aim is to construct a broad understanding of what the respondents thought it meant to be Christian.

What Christianity Means To Respondents

I propose that there are two ways that the respondents articulated their religious faith. Firstly when they talk about what they believe as Christians and secondly, what they feel being Christian is all about. In other words their Christian belief-systems and Christian values. These were often given equal weighting but I will begin by exploring what the respondents meant when talking about what they believe in as Christians and then turn to look at what being Christian means in the light of these beliefs, if they are indeed important.

Christian Beliefs

The data seems to suggest that the supernatural nature of Christianity was not vitally important for the respondents. The idea of an all powerful creator was often something that often did not play an important role in constructing faith. There is however a divide here between the more liberal Christians (such as the MCC members and those no longer attending) and the conservative Christians, particularly the Roman Catholic and the Evangelical Christians. The four respondents' who put an emphasis upon the idea that God is a supernatural entity were Delilah, Ruth, Rose and Cornelius whose beliefs could be called more traditional in that they believe in an actual physical God who plays a practical role in everyday life. Here Rose outlines this argument:

I struggle with this type of question because my background is Roman Catholic, I think that plays a part in all...but I can't understand a world where no-one is there. I know there is no-one in the clouds (laughs) but God has a physical presence and can do good in the world [interviewer prompt for examples]...it's everywhere but we just have to see it. (Rose)

Although sounding rather cryptic Rose is talking about the role God plays in her life and what it means for her to be a Christian. She has a belief in a God that is active in everyday life and makes a difference to the world surrounding her. Therefore for her being a Christian is about believing in a God who is supernatural and has a real presence. This often worked hand in hand with more literal interpretations of religious scripture and literal understandings of creation theory. In the questionnaire there were a couple of questions used to gauge whether they supported a creationist perspective. One such question being do you believe that God created bisexuality, followed by an opportunity to discuss why. The question was intended to explore whether the respondents felt that God had created the world and everything in it (including bisexuality). Of the entire sample 30% stated that indeed bisexuality was created by God often citing that everything was created by God and therefore bisexuality as well. 26% said such an assertion was false giving reasons such as bisexuality being a social construction and therefore nothing to do with God. Most however were completely unsure (44%) and noted that such a large and theological question was too difficult. However this does highlight the fact that of the sample a good amount of respondents' believed that God created the world and that as an entity he plays a role in everyday life.

The majority of the respondents saw Christianity more as a guide or as something secure to affix themselves. In other words they used the teachings of the Church and

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religious scripture more loosely. One respondent, Jim told me that 'Jesus and God are metaphors or images to help us...they weren't real people but if we use their examples we are better for it'. This type of Christianity seems harder to pin down because rather than the more literal approach which follows the teaching of the Bible and sees the events in it as more literal, this approach is far more personal and difficult to generalise. Of course, all the respondents believed in God but how this manifests itself is far more complex. A belief in God for most of the respondents in this research project was about understanding God as a state of mind or belief in something that cannot be explained through rationality, rather than a believing in, as Rose put it, someone in the clouds. This sounds rather closer to agnosticism, connecting with God on a personal level rather than physically connecting with an actual God. This theological standpoint dates back to the work of Robinson (1963) who suggested that just because there might be no-one up there does not mean God does not exist. This is discrediting the idea that God is up there rather than denying Christianity. I believe that this has a direct relation to the respondents' sexuality and am not arguing that all Christians have this type of belief system. Take for example the life-story of Elanor whom I discussed in the previous chapter with regards to her sexual story. Her spiritual story seems very characteristic of the responses from the interviewees. Although only attending sporadically, she saw her Christian identity as a key facet of her everyday life and through her Christian beliefs her take on the world was filtered:

> ...it is very important...although I'm not happy clappy and I don't preach, in both senses of the word, you know, in Church or to people I know, or don't know...but it is just part of me and I believe in what my religion has to say about the way to live... (Elanor)

A picture emerged from the data of Christianity as a way of thinking or ideology, rather than a belief in God. Christianity was about values and principles rather than believing in a set of traditions or aspects of the Bible. For example, none of the respondents' said in order to be a Christian you must believe in something specific from Christian teaching, although they often outlined specific beliefs for themselves. In this respect Christianity is not a set of rules to follow it is a means to help shape answers about what is correct and good in the world. This has been discussed by Bauman (1993) in what he calls 'Postmodern Ethics' or the relationship between traditional structures (such as religion) and those with influences in our contemporary society. Giddens' (1991) idea of the reflexive self also proposes life as a project constructed through interaction with others. In this scenario the respondents questioned the authority of the Church and created reflexive and individualised understandings of their faith. Therefore, Christian beliefs are reference points within life's bigger project.

Therefore it is appropriate here to move onto what the respondents thought being Christian was all about and this will help to unpack what Christian beliefs actually were for the respondents.

Being Christian

A number of the respondents spoke passionately about their faith but also with concern as to the way that Christianity is popularly viewed today. For the majority of the respondents there was frustration that Christianity seems to have lost its focus and that what they believed Christianity was about was not in line with the popular perception of Christianity. Faith was not about specific denominational practices or traditions and

respondents suggested that focussing upon these more formal aspects of faith has meant that Christianity has lost its way with regard to the Christian message. Philip, a self-defined Methodist who had originally trained for the priest-hood (withdrawing just prior to his ordination), spoke how dividing faith into sections simply dilutes the message of Christianity. For example stressing the importance of orders of service wastes time and energy which should be used in delivering the Christian message. Sexuality then, was not an issue for Phillip, rather the wider picture of a faith that has lost its focus. I quote at length:

> But sexuality was not really important. I can see that there were some…spiritual differences. I was trying to achieve things that the Church wasn't about. I was looking at wanting to see changes in people's lives, changes in people living more liberated lives in the love of God. I found the Church to be more like a prison with me as the prison warder. More that kind of issue and I had to conform to that sort of institution. So I left…In the town I lived in just outside [town in the North of England], I tried to bring about a relationship between denominations, particularly the Catholics…and I wanted to bring everyone out of the woodwork and it was very decisively turned down. I though sod this, I've tried and tried and it's not going anywhere. I think the church and Jesus in particular is about freedom and liberation and reconciliation and living in the love of God. I think the idea of different denominations is against the point of life. It's clear that there is vested interest. I became less and less interested in the church.

Although this passage highlights Phillip's dissociation with the church I use it here to show that it is the type of faith practised in organised Christianity which Phillip is unhappy with. Phillip's problem lies with the issue of faith in general and what Christianity should be as opposed to how faith is portrayed through the church. Practices and

traditions (the Eucharist for example in Phillip's case) should not be the focus of the Christian belief-system; rather it should be morals and values which are Christian. Christianity in other words has lost its precision. It is Christian values such as 'loving thy neighbour' or treating others with respect that respondents cherished. Michael here discusses what he sees as the vital aspects of his faith:

> The world just is different now, we know things that we didn't know then and…you know…for me this is vital for Christianity…if it is going to survive and mean anything then it has to adapt, else it will become meaningless…So I focus upon the bits that feel right for me, things that feel like…feel like God I suppose (long pause). I want to believe Christianity is about love and co-operation and not about what we shouldn't do. (Michael 27 from the Midlands).

From the data it seems that Christian values are vital in order to be Christian. Values such as love, friendship, co-operation and social justice are all important values if one is going to be labelled Christian. Upholding these views and living in this way was almost as important in believing in God and the teaching of Jesus. Throughout the data there are countless examples of a return to traditional Christian values. Jim talks about acting in a 'Christian' manner.

> Its everything in a way isn't it [religion], a way of feeling that there is something to believe in…that's not very clear really. I suppose if you boil it down I just use my faith as a guide through life, there are some good teaching(s) in the Bible and I think some of them you

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can apply to everyday life ways of being with people and how to act in a Christian manner. (Jim)

Here Jim seems to be talking about the idea that how you act as a Christian is just as important as what you believe as a Christian in terms of shaping ones identity. This is furthered by Alfred's observation of his sister.

My sister is a great person that's why I told her about myself, she is married to a Presbyterian minister. She is one of the nicest persons I've ever met, her heart's in everything. No matter what she says or does people just love her, and of my family...they are all Christians and nothing I've seen them do makes me think that they are hypocrites. The Church that my parents go to, they have been going on and off since I was 12/13, I still see the 3 Covenanter's leaders who were there when I was little. I've never met any Christians who have turned me off; it's always been the other way. The lives that these people are leading...there must be something good about it. (Alfred)

It is his sisters loving outlook on life that he sees as being Christian here. Samantha begins to pick out key characteristics which are seen as Christian.

You can reflect on Bible, bits of it...but it's what you make it. I think people just need to do what is Christian, follow what Jesus said. Jesus was an example and that is what I want to do...loving and caring for people. (Samantha)

This seems to further the argument that Jim put forward above, that Christianity is a moral code which helps people through life. This subject has been discussed by Wilcox (2002) in her study of lesbian, gay and bisexual Christians. Wilcox found that her respondents conceptualised God as LGBT friendly with an emphasis upon 'love' rather than commandment and following. Her results show that respondents separated themselves from the idea that God could be unforgiving, emphasising love and inclusivity. It is evident from the data I have presented that this runs through this project also.

Christianity also offered support for the respondents and being a Christian was a source of much comfort. Maynard, Gorsuch and Bjorck (2001) argued that believing in God helped individuals to cope in times of difficulty and turmoil. This is evident in my data also and is in line with the idea that Christianity offers reference points in the life projects of the respondents. God was used to help the respondents through times of difficulty.

Frustration towards the focus of the Church on tradition and ceremony was almost unanimous. However, for the Catholic respondents' these practices were intertwined with belief and affiliation runs deeper than simply which church one attends or the type of service one enjoys. The most striking example comes from Cornelius, a Roman Catholic. Cornelius continued to practice several traditional routines such as the daily reciting of Catechisms. He seems to suggest that such a sustained performance becomes integral to one's religious identity and for Cornelius such activities defined his beliefs and therefore defined who he was as a person. The following quotation makes Cornelius' ideas clearer.

But that's what we learnt. Who made me? God made me. Why did God make me? To love him, serve him and be happy with him, in this world and forever in the next. And they were the first two sections of the catechisms that we learnt by rote. In the morning after the morning prayers and hymns, and it never varied, every morning it was the same, apart from when we went to mass, then we didn't, we said our prayers and then we were off to mass. But that's what we learnt, and if it's true now then he made me the way I am. (Cornelius)

For Cornelius such sentiments become true because they are passed down from a higher authority. He believes them because he has grown up believing them to be true, so to reject such teaching would mean he would have to re-evaluate his entire outlook on life.

Ruth, a 24 year-old Catholic also expressed this relationship and the inter-twining or her 'self' and her belief-system.

And then around 14 or 15, around that time, mid late teens my dad lost his interest or whatever in it [Anglicanism] and converted to Catholicism, which was a complete switch. But there's a kind of logic to it because that's what I ended up doing as well. There is a lot of campness in the Catholic church and I like all that, it's just me!...So that's the path I took and I guess now I'm…I don't know, I'm still practising. (Ruth)

Although these two examples are clearly the minority there seems to be a strong suggestion in these examples that for them Christianity means having some sort of traditional background. The routine and ceremony for them plays a part in their understanding of what Christianity means and further suggests that their religion is about a

life-style and an integral part of their public identity. Being Christian for both Cornelius and Ruth is about belonging to a community and to a Church. Although research continually suggests that Church attendance is declining (Bruce 2000, Cameron 2003) it is evident that there are people who require this communal aspect of religion. This space in which individuals belong offers opportunity to learn and to grow as religious beings. King (2001) argues for the importance of community in belief. Community, it is argues, stretches beyond shared belief to embrace pluralism and difference. In other words, being involved in a community not only strengthens ones belief it also alerts us to difference which we learn about and respect. Hope, a respondent from the north of England, spoke about how going to Church re-affirms your belief systems and lets you solidify your religious identity:

Yeah. I think you do get a lot out of Church and ideally it should be the most important part of your spirituality, worship and pray with a community, and to be part of a community, understand religion together. (Hope)

It is a personal thing but it would be hard to keep a Christian faith without the right environment. You need to share your faith and to grow, and deal with life's challenges, membership to a church is very important. (John)

The data does seem to suggest that this more formalised Christianity is less evident amongst bisexual Christians. As Beseke (2005) argues religion must engage with people beyond the Church and in spaces which are not restricted to religious discussion. The movement from Church to society does not have to dilute the conversation. This is

shown in the support groups that the respondents constructed away from the Church. With such a high percentage no longer attending (25%) these spaces become vital.

As I have alluded to there seems to be a divide in the type of beliefs held by the respondents based upon how literally religious scripture is applied. This is a feature that often separates different types or denominations of Christianity, therefore the chapter moves to explore the role of denomination further to see whether it has an impact upon how the respondents understood their faith.

Denominational Variation

Christianity is diverse and the research shows that the various denominations are represented by bisexual individuals. However, although 23% of the sample was Anglican, 35% stated that they belonged to no official denomination, therefore refusing to categorise their beliefs in this manner. The table below sets out the denominational divide of respondents:

Table 2: Respondents' denominational affiliation

Denomination	Number (N)	Percentage of sample (%)
Christian but with no official denomination	28	35
Anglican	18	22.5
Metropolitan Community Church (MCC)	13	16.3
Methodist	10	12.5
Catholic	5	6.3
Evangelical	2	2.5
Russian Orthodox	2	2.5
Quaker	1	1.3
Unitarian	1	1.3
Total	80	100%

Table 2 shows that although the majority of respondents did not have a

denomination, a good variation of denominations were represented in the sample,

particularly Anglican, Methodist and MCC. Of this sub-set of respondents any alliance with

a particular Church or belief-system was rejected, as respondents' did not define their faith

in terms of their denomination. This often coupled with a move away from organised

Christianity (usually displayed through Church attendance). This pushed their faith outside

any specific denominational belief system or church practice. Cornelius, a 45-year old man was almost ashamed to call himself Roman Catholic because of the negative connotations which arise from such identification. Cornelius himself listed the recent scandals regarding disgraced priests and the Churches outdated views of human sexuality as reasons for being wary of calling oneself Catholic.

The tendency to not identify with a particular denomination has been seen by some to suggest a weakening of the Christian church. Bruce (2002) has used this argument to suggest both that the West (particularly the UK) is becoming less religious (more accurately would be 'less Christian') and also highlights the failure of the New Age to replace this decline. Bruce argues that new types of Christianity or 'Unitarian-Universalism' (Bruce 2002:79) are not true religions at all. He argues that types or forms of Christianity not rooted in institutional Christianity which promote ideas of self-worship and pluralism do not qualify as religions. However, research and theory is not unanimous in this assumption. Both Yip (2003) and Hunt (2003) suggest that this turn to more individualised faith, or faith constructed around the self simply represents a different type of Christianity, or merely different worship methods. Therefore the decline in denominational Christianity (as shown in my data) does not represent a decline in Christianity, rather a shift in the type of Christianity practised.

Hope was a 29 year old woman who had been struggling with her denominational affiliation and the pressures of religious authority structures, after rather traumatic and harrowing experiences with both Evangelical and Methodist Churches. Combined with this trust in oneself as the originator of religiosity she also stresses the need for flexibility within denominations, rather downplaying Bruce's (2002) suggestion that a move away from fixed authority structures necessarily means that one is less religious as such. However, Hope called for a need for the Church to recognise that divergent belief-systems were being

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ostracised from organised worship. The rigidity of the Church experience has the potential to cause alienation for those who do not fit in. Particular denominations produced a version of Christianity which was too narrow and rigid:

> I couldn't bear what they were being taught, and I moved to this house when I was 23, and I did start going to church, I went to quite a few different ones, I just didn't find the God I knew inside myself there, and I felt wrong in them. So the last Church I went to regularly was some sort of Methodist Church but one of the splits, I'm not quite sure which one, and it had guest preachers, there was like a preacher but he did pastoral stuff not preaching. So there was a guest every week. One came out with the evils of the world and said we all know what the problem is, we all know the root of this, it's homosexuality, and to a man everyone in the congregation went 'Hallelujah Amen'.

Yet flexibility within Christian belief structures is evident, particularly in the case of those involved in the Metropolitan Community Church (hereinafter MCC). The church seemingly embodies acceptance of difference and a flexible attitude regarding morality and behaviour. As their mission statement makes clear:

> The Metropolitan Community Church is a Christian church with congregations all over the world. We are rooted in, and reach beyond, the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender communities. We believe all the things you'd expect a Christian Church to believe - we uphold the traditional Apostles' and Nicene creeds - yet we don't discriminate. We realise that Jesus never discriminated and think it is sad that so many of his followers seem to! (MCC)

Therefore to be linked spirituality with one's denomination changes meaning. Rather than becoming a part of one's identity it reflects the flexible nature of faith and the elasticity of Christianity.

It depends on who you are and the person you are. The MCC is almost like Christian pluralism, because there are so many people who come from different backgrounds, there are Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, Catholics and Anglicans, United Reforms, Methodist, when you get them people together they have a lot of wisdom and their own traditions. To some if it's in the Bible it's just true but for others you need to put it into the modern-day context. Like when it says father, it should be balanced with mother. (Christella)

The above statement is from Christella a 24- year old woman from the South East of England, a member of the local MCC. It is therefore unsurprising that such a statement is very much aligned with the literature produced by the MCC:

Christianity is the revelation of God in Jesus Christ and is the religion set forth in the scriptures. Jesus Christ is foretold in the Old Testament, presented in the New Testament, and proclaimed by the Christian Church in every age and in every land. Founded in the interest of offering a church home to all who confess and believe, Metropolitan Community Church moves in the mainstream of Christianity. (MCC)

For members of the MCC it is therefore more difficult to talk about faith in terms of denominational variation or specificities which make certain systems unique, as the range of beliefs is so diverse.

Christianity does not necessarily mean what the Church officially says it means. The process of understanding someone's faith is not one-way as the priest or Church leader does not act as the giver of information. The congregation is not a passive receptacle of knowledge. The religious individual is an equal interpretative force as the preacher and this was evident throughout the data and in particular the stories that the respondents told me. However, it is the case that not all denominations appreciate this fact, expecting their teaching to be accepted without question. Traditionally, the Anglican Church has been viewed as diverse in terms of its practices and theology (Pickering 1998). However, such is not the case across the spectrum of denominations. The example comes with an Evangelical Church. Evangelicalism is clear in its teaching in that it respects the absolute truth of the Bible. The Bible is infallible and often to be taken literally. Delilah was a 21 year old female from the North-West of England whose family were heavily involved in their local Evangelical Church. This meant in turn that she felt a duty to attend. Although this allowed her a place to worship with others, the rigidity of the belief system and the teaching of the Church was constricting:

> You see, it's not just that they take a more literal view of the Bible, but it's their little view
> of the Bible. I mean it's not that I got automatically thrown out, because I came out at
> the end of the summer term, and got given the summer holidays to think and pray about
> it all [her sexuality and her faith]. So I did. And I spoke to people who knew in-depth the
> Bible from both sides and neither side convinced me, and I was like, well doesn't that say
> something. Doesn't it say that if it was clear cut then clearly it would be clear cut, but it

didn't? So I went back to them and said, look the Bible could be interpreted as saying both things, and they were like no (laughs) we believe the one interpretation. (Delilah)

Having explored the personal meanings that the respondents attached to Christianity and the role denomination plays in faith it could be suggested that the majority of the respondents would prefer to call themselves spiritual or at least 'Christian' spiritual, side-stepping the need to affiliate with any particular denomination. The term spiritual is problematic in that it is difficult to tie down exactly what is meant. Heelas (1996) for example has linked it with a move away from institutionalised faith and towards New Age Spiritualities, preferring to call those who are spiritual but Christian as engaging in 'theistic spirituality', whereas Woodhead (2001) has linked spirituality to a faith which uses the self as the guiding light. This has been developed by Yip (2003) in relation to lesbian, gay and bisexual Christians and suggests that non-heterosexuals often use the self as the basis of Christian faith rather than Church authority. My research does suggest that Davie's (1994) idea of 'believing without belonging' is being demonstrated by the sample. It is possible to be Christian without attending Church and the label that is often applied to people who do this is 'spiritual'. Unlike research which suggests spirituality suggests a belief in 'something' no matter whether it is grounded in Christianity or not (see Hunt 2003), the respondents' all took Christianity as the starting point. Therefore I use the term Christian spiritual to take into account these various ideas. Without wanting to be overly reductive the respondents tended to practice a spirituality which was informed by Christianity but had been somewhat individualised. This will be dealt with fully in the 'Negotiating Spirituality' section of the next chapter, but it is clear that when talking about Christianity respondents were talking about Christianity as a kind of spirituality which can be moulded and shaped to suit them rather than a rigid set of beliefs.

The respondents' stories of Christianity illustrated a more fluid understanding of Christianity moving beyond official Church teaching and scripture towards ideas informed by their own experience such as different conceptions of God and the role of their sexuality. This does not show a decline in their belief, rather a heighten connection between their life experience and their beliefs. Lyon (2000) argues that in fact this makes those who are religious today more serious because their religion has not been ascribed at birth. Choices have been made about religion based on experience which shows the importance of religion in their lives.

SUMMARY

This chapter has been a diverse exploration of bisexuality and Christianity and how the respondents' who took part in the research project understood their own sexuality and faith. It has shown that there is great variation in self-definitions yet there are themes and ideas as well as challenges which constantly re-occur. The focus began with an internal examination on the part of the respondents', looking at their own experiences and thoughts regarding the meaning of bisexuality and Christianity in lives. The central questions were, when respondents spoke of bisexuality what in fact did they mean, furthermore, what did they mean by Christian? Taking these accounts forward, the next chapter moves to explore what happens in practical terms to individuals who are bisexual and Christian. The key question is what negotiations take place.

CHAPTER 6: ADD GOD AND STIR: THE NEGOTIATION OF BISEXUALITY AND CHRISTIANITY

INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter was a focussed exploration of what the respondents' meant when they talked about bisexuality and Christianity, the self-definitions they constructed and the meanings they attached. The aim of this chapter is to explore the negotiations that take place in terms of their sexuality and faith. What happens to the respondents' understanding of their sexuality and their spirituality when they add God and stir? The phrase 'Add God and stir' is useful and I use it to suggest that there is potential for tension when respondents integrate their sexuality and religious faith. Therefore what happens to the respondents' sexuality when we add their religious faith, but also what happens to their religious faith when we add sexuality. Here the focus is upon the potential clashes and negotiations which take when we consider these two identities alongside one another. I am interested in the outcomes of their intersections and how they work together and the complex identity management strategies and techniques that the respondents employ.

I propose that from the data there are three possible outcomes when exploring how the respondents lived as bisexual Christians. These outcomes are not mutually exclusive as will become apparent throughout. They work together in a process of constant negotiation and re-negotiation, which in turn results in re-interpretation, re-imagining,

adaption and even resistance. In order to be both bisexual and Christian something happens to their sexuality in order for them to be Christian, and it is also possible that something will happen to their religious faith in order for them to be bisexual. Each of these outcomes are treated individually as section in this chapter, although as previously noted there are likely to be overlaps between each of the outcomes.

Firstly, that in order to be both bisexual and Christian something must happen to the respondents' sexuality for them to consider themselves Christian. In this scenario there is a re-evaluation of what it means to be bisexual. There are three major ways that this works in the lives of the respondents: By aligning themselves with lesbian and gay Christians and therefore downplaying the uniqueness of their own sexuality. This often results in understanding sexuality in terms of behaviour but is a technique that bisexuals have employed in order to find security and a supportive community in which to locate themselves. Secondly, the respondents re-conceptualised bisexuality completely, deconstructing what sexuality means and what it means to be bisexual. This is most commonly played out in terms of a de-sexualisation or a challenge to the nature of relationships. The respondents questioned the line between friendship and sexuality arguing that bisexuality was often closer to friendship whilst still being distinct from asexuality. Finally, I argue that religious authority, often through religious scripture organised Christian worship and higher Church authority, has forced bisexuals to re-evaluate what their sexuality means to them. In this section there is an exploration of how bisexuality is re-conceptualised in the midst of this pressure.

The second possible outcome for the respondents is that they are forced, either by external pressures or through their own personal agency, to compromise their faith due to the fact that their sexuality is so problematic in the eyes of their faith. I also argue that there are three main responses here: Firstly, that the respondents began a process of

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individualisation where their faith became centred on their own personal experience rather than institutional teaching. The idea of individualisation is popular amongst contemporary scholars (Bauman 2001, Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 2002 are but two examples) and I will argue that this is no coincidence when looking at the data. Secondly, working alongside both these arguments is the suggestion that bisexual Christians have begun to actively challenge religious authority in the guise of the clergy. And finally there is the challenge of Bible interpretation and fitting their faith with their sexuality. Using the work of Yip in particular I explore the arguments and locate them within the experience of my respondents.

The final possible outcome is a reconciliation of sexuality and faith by compromising a little of both. Although this sounds like the obvious solution, respondents often argued that one meant more to them than the other and they adapted sexuality (for example) to fit with their very deep and personal spirituality. In other words one identity was often the core identity with the other adjusted to match. However, in reality it was rare that even if the respondent was adamant that they had not changed their sexuality (for example) because of their spirituality, they had not adjusted their sexuality slightly because of the pressures of their spirituality. This final section explores the more practical aspects of living as a bisexual Christian. Although respondents often argued in line with either of the first two outcomes (they either compromised their sexuality or spirituality) in reality they probably did a little of both, which further highlights a distinction between internalised thought and practice. Here we have an amalgamation of the first two sections and I will show how these two ideas work together.

NEGOTIATING SEXUALITY

What happens to (bi)sexuality when one throws Christianity into the mix? I suggest that there are three main responses highlighted by my data: To align with homosexual responses, to reconceptualise the concept of bisexuality or to re-image bisexuality in-line with religious teaching.

Firstly, to align oneself with a more secure and stable community which has been fighting for religious equality, therefore diminishing the unique question that bisexuality asks of Christianity, but potentially allowing for greater acceptance based on arguments put forward by gay and lesbian Christians.

Alignment with Lesbian and Gay Discourses

Many of the respondents aligned themselves with lesbian and gay Christians and often saw the issues they faced as similar (if not the same) as lesbian and gay Christians. The stories they told in this respect are not original or new as they have been discussed elsewhere in greater detail (see Yip 2000) it is useful to see that the respondents here often echo the arguments previously put forward. These ideas are fascinating because they further highlight the extreme marginalization of bisexual individuals as they are denied any unique bisexual space. After presenting the arguments the section will discuss why such as response was constructed and the importance of these stories even though the ideas are not entirely new.

Catholic and Anglican respondents (in particular) were very aware of the current on-going debates and controversies within the Church. Adam a keen Church attendee talks about this linking it to scripture:

It makes me so bloody angry that the Church is hypocritical, and they will use this excuse of 'well the Bible says', and it's cherry-picking. A comparable thing is slavery; the Bible probably says more about slavery and supports the idea of slavery, than it does about gay sex. But the Church these days conveniently forgets about those bits in the Bible, but hangs onto these few scraps about gay sex. And then its males, not...I think someone said to me once that there was one reference to lesbian gay sex and even there it is men who are disapproved of more. But it's this absurd hypocrisy that they hang on to one bit. The get-out is often, well its Church tradition, and they can say anything with that. If they are actually saying what is scriptural it's totally hypocritical.

The constant focus of the Church's policies and the official line on sexuality and sexual activity may explain why the respondents often reduced such a complicate issue down to behaviour. In this scenario respondents understood their sexuality as relating solely to sexual behaviour and who they have sex with. There was no consideration of attraction, self-identification or spiritual connection for example.

The focus of organised religion upon the act of sex itself has directly impacted upon the way the respondents viewed their own sexuality. Put simply, the demonization of the act of same-sex intercourse meant that respondents were forced to spend time considering the claims by the Church and relating them to their own lives. For example, the Anglican Church problematizes relationships involving members of the same-sex on

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the grounds that the sexual act itself is deemed unnatural. This is backed up with a

traditional or conservative reading of the Bible. Therefore the recommendations from the

Anglican Church are that individuals in relationships with members of the same-sex should

stay celibate (House of Bishops 2003). When commenting upon the statement 'Scripture

may say nothing about homosexual orientation but it's very clear that homosexual

behaviour can never be acceptable' the official response is:

> The advantages of this approach are twofold. First, it takes seriously the evidence that we
>
> have looked at in this chapter that, both in the Old Testament and the New, homosexual
>
> activity is regarded as sinful. Secondly, by allowing for a distinction between orientation
>
> and behaviour it creates a possible pastoral space for affirming someone who is
>
> homosexual as a person while disapproving their behaviour. To use the old adage, it
>
> makes it easier to 'hate the sin, but love the sinner' on the grounds that the disposition
>
> itself is neutral, it is what people do or don't do that is the issue. (House of Bishops 2003:
>
> 152-153)

If an individual is therefore bisexual they must either abstain or choose

heterosexual marriage. In the previous consideration, 'Issues in Human Sexuality' (1991)

the Church makes the position very clear. Alongside calling bisexuality 'ambiguous', the

report concludes:

> The Church's guidance to bisexual Christians is that if they are capable of heterophile
>
> relationships and of satisfaction within them, they should follow the way of holiness in

either celibacy or abstinence or heterosexual marriage. (Quoted in House of Bishops 2000:215)

This is made plain in the updated (2000) issue when the authors, commenting upon the above quotation conclude:

Bisexual activity is always wrong, principally because it inevitably involves infidelity. The right course for bisexual Christians is either celibacy or heterosexual marriage. (215)

By focussing so squarely upon anal intercourse as an indication of homosexuality and bisexuality, and suggesting that bisexuals are individuals who practise anal intercourse with men and also have relations with women, the pressure on bisexuals to consider themselves in terms of their sexual behaviour only is very apparent. This was something that many of the respondents discussed. Alfred, Richard, Adam, Michael and Jim for example all felt the need to tackle the issue of sexual behaviour head-on. Jim in particular highlights the undue focus applied to the sex lives of the respondents:

I am unsure why what I do...sexually is of so much concern and the fascination. A friend of mine who still attends was asked flat out whether he had sex with his partner...It's too easy to say that a person is gay because they've had sex with someone of the same sex. But that's what it feels like; I'm this way because of what I do. (Jim)

Here Jim is considering the official message that the Church (in his experience) seems to champion and points out the undue prominence given to the physical act of sex. The quantitative data also supports this idea through several key indicators. Firstly, 68 (85%) of the respondents stated that the Church does not understand bisexuality, therefore seeming to confirm the worrying suggestion that what the Anglican Church is considering is not in fact modern bisexuality. Secondly, 48 (60%) argued that the Bible was used as a weapon against bisexuality. Respondents' clearly thought that religious texts were being misused as representations of homosexuality rather than homosexual acts. Finally, when given the opportunity to discuss within the questionnaire why bisexuality was misunderstood respondents used these two ideas to formulate their answer stating that the Church reduces sexuality down to sexual behaviour and it uses the Bible to justify this focus upon sexual acts. In the additional comments section, Jeff, a 31 year-old man from Durham stated:

I am fed up of being told about Romans and extracts of the Bible that talk about not having sex with men. The way that priests use the Bible is shameful you know...it just makes you keep thinking about the way you are all the time...

His ex-Churches insistence to know about his sex life meant that Jeff was forced to leave his Church and also a direct impact upon his sexuality. However, the sacrifice here is his attendance at Church and not his sexuality. Not all the respondents' felt the same way as Jeff and it was often more difficult than to simply no longer attend Church (or other forms of organised worship. To continue with Jeff's life-story from above, he discussed the

stresses that were put upon him because of his sexuality and the presumptions that were made because of his sexuality:

> It got worse when I told the priest at my community church...and he wouldn't leave me alone asking about my personal life. I'm not trying to say all priests are like this but the Church thinks that because of my sexuality I'm having sex with both men and women...I wasn't though you see...what did that make me?

Jeff became preoccupied with analysing his sexuality and spent an enormous amount of time talking to the priest he mentions:

> ...and it was decided that I had in fact chosen heterosexuality...I wasn't having sex with men anymore and my previous partner had been female. It felt the right thing to say I had decided to be heterosexual because this is what sexuality was all about, who you were with at that given time...

Jeff's story highlights a trend in the data which needs to be made clear here. Several respondents (but not the majority) during the interview stage did not distinguish themselves from lesbians and gay men and thought that their experiences were not distinct from those of lesbian and gay Christians, particularly with regard to religious authority and scripture. This will become clearer as the chapter explores the relationship between bisexual and religious scripture using the work of Yip, which further demonstrates some of

the respondents' failure, or choice, to distinguish themselves from lesbian and gay Christians.

These ideas are important but they do not show any distinction between the research into lesbian and gay Christians (Yip 2000, Wilcox 2002). In the alignment with other non-heterosexuals the respondents' added weight and solidarity to their arguments and the cause. The argument here is they felt a strong combined effort against the Church would produce the best results. However, from the stories that the respondents' told me this does not seem an accurate representation of the bisexual Christian experience. There are issues facing bisexual Christians that are only likely to affect them and the catch-all attitude which is evident in this section undermines the uniqueness of bisexuality and threatens to skim over the real issues. In response to my question about why there are no separate support networks/groups for bisexual Christians, Michael argued that '...there aren't enough of us and it would make what we are saying less important' (Michael). This shows the concern that bisexual Christians have about their own visibility. In aligning themselves solely with the arguments put forward by the other non-heterosexual Christians the respondents fail to address issues such as: monosexuality, monogamy, choice, relationship structures, promiscuity and cheating, sexual tolerance within the Church. As the chapter moves forward it the exploration moves to issues which are unique to bisexuality and the responses to this.

Re-conceptualising Bisexuality

Bisexuality was often re-conceptualised as a sexuality which was non-sexual, or in less radical instances the sexual part of bisexuality was diluted. This was often done in

relation to friendship and a general challenge of what it meant to be sexual. Faith also could have an enhancing effect upon sexuality and some respondents argued that their faith actually made them understand their sexuality. Here we explore how respondents altered or re-imagined their sexuality in order to make it fit.

Religion did often add considerable strain on the respondents' sexualities. Possibly as a result of this focus upon sexual behaviour by the Church, or more likely as a response to the Church's lack of understanding towards bisexuality. Respondents often began a process of de-sexualisation in which their own sexuality and sexual behaviours took a back seat to their faith. The pressure from their religious beliefs meant sexuality had to be readjusted. This was done in several ways, firstly by blurring the lines between friendship and sexuality and having 'close' friends. By doing this the respondents addressed several issues which were problematic for their faith. These close relationships gave them the same-sex time that they wanted whilst not being in a relationship nor having sex. To use a Catholic phrase no seed was being wasted and therefore no sin being committed. It is however apparent that there are only a handful of stories which resonate with this idea, mostly notably Phillip and John whom I discussed in the previous section. The adjusting of sexuality was not a technique used by the respondents in general. Phillip discussed the problems which sex introduces into the relationships and the need for more untainted and open relationships. But it also became clear throughout the interview that for Phillip sexual activity was not part of his sexual identity and this was due in part with his previous commitments to his church:

> I met a person who is now my best friend, and he is married and made it clear that he is
>
> not gay, but I think the jury is still out on that because let's just say we've had some
>
> interesting conversations, for me to realise that it is something he had to work through.

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I'm not entirely clear that what he is saying is the real story...he's...I just think he is the loveliest guy in the universe (inaudible)...he's wonderful we've known each other for years and years and I don't think I'd want anything to happen, if there developed a sexual side to our friendship...

For several respondents celibacy resolved the dissonance between their faith and their sexuality. By not actually practising in terms of sex, one is not being 'bisexual'.

Faith however, can have a positive effect upon sexuality and it would be incorrect and naive to suggest that all the respondents' changed their sexuality in a way that they found restrictive. It could be argued that in fact the true message of the Christian Church is best espoused through bisexuality. Using the life of Jesus Christ as an example respondents' attempted to construct their sexuality along the lines of Christian morals and practice. Michael discussed some of these values:

...just simple things like kindness, loving individuals for who they are, not being judgemental, looking inside...

Although Michael himself didn't link this to his own life or his sexuality several respondents' were brave enough to make this link. Rose discussed the importance of Jesus in her life and the way that she wanted to interact with others:

I do [want to follow the example of Jesus] because that is the ideal way to be isn't it. That's the point of the New Testament...that's what I want for my relationships. [I] want

my life to be open to the idea of being attracted to everyone and having the potential to be with anyone [interviewer prompt for clarification]...of course if I click with that person.

Faith in this respect is seen as entirely compatible with bisexuality because of its focus upon inclusion and social justice, and sexuality does not have to change in any notable way. A distinct possibility however is that in playing down the incompatibility of bisexuality with organised Christianity bisexuality is completely de-sexualized and becomes a sexuality which is unconcerned with sexual behaviour on any level (relationships, sexual attraction or physical behaviour). In refusing to define their sexuality bisexuality becomes compatible with the Christian faith because both aspects of their lives become individualised to the highest degree possible. During the questionnaire one respondent, to whom I have assigned the pseudonym of Thompson (30 from the London area) continually refused to label his sexuality and argued:

I can't answer this question as it presumes my sexuality is a certain way [referring to whether he can understand his sexuality in terms of attraction]. You cannot separate me from my sexuality and therefore neither will God. My sexuality is personal to me and I can see nowhere where my sexuality is recognised by the church because it would be impossible to tie down.

Although the statement is rather philosophical the point that Thompson seems to be trying to make is that his sexuality is so personal, so flexible and so individual to him that so talk of the Church being negative towards his sexuality is impossible as the Church

would have to draw up individual action plans for everyone. This is a difficult idea to grasp but it would seem that for some bisexual Christians, bisexuality is something more than being attracted (on different levels) to members of any sex.

A definite trend has emerged from the research. In general, respondents' tended to not adjust their sexuality to meet the demands of their faith. It was much more common for them to challenge their faith and reconstruct their beliefs in-line with their sexuality. Numerous respondents expressed their sexuality as less important than their faith, suggesting that their sexuality was not necessarily part of who they were but just something they did. One respondent who has been previously discussed is Michael. He summed this situation up rather neatly. He describes his sexuality as something that is part of him but just a small part of his life influencing only his partners and lifestyle to a small degree. Yet this spirituality is much more set in stone in terms of guidance and moral codes. Christianity acts as a guide or set of values which create purpose and structure to one's life. The aspects of Christianity can be modified and altered and indeed Michael does this with his worship style, but the over-arching Christian ethic stands fast. The tenants of Christianity such as love, peace, friendship, justice and compassion for our fellow human is something that effects life on a daily basis and the choices made.

> I do have an altar in my spare room, but things like that aren't important really...the candles aren't important either really none of it is really...I just need a space to be alone with me and God and to think about the correct thing to do…the Christian thing to do…it's a reflection on the day and on the things that are going on in my life…I think it's just a chance to take the outside world away…to take my life outside of itself…to look at something more important and clear…that's it exactly…clarity…I just need to put aside

society and look within me to find God and to talk to him without any sort of outside influence…any noise…any sort of disruptions or anything like that.

For Michael religion is a very loose form of ideology and forces sexuality into the background. In this instance bisexuality does not become a strong and well defined sexual identity and the meanings that respondents attach to it become rather weak and less radical or challenging to the concept of human sexuality and how it works.

However, the second most popular response was to continue attending church but keep sexuality secret. This is entirely possible for bisexual individuals who decide to conceal their sexuality because of the unique gender position they occupy and the inherent heterosexism that exists within society. For example it is entirely possible for respondents' to pass as either heterosexual or homosexual if the situation decreed it.

Table 3: Indicators of the flexibility of bisexuality (N=80)

Statement:	Strongly agree/agree	Strongly disagree/disagree	Unsure
Bisexuality allows you to fit into both heterosexual and homosexual communities	32 (40%)	26 (32%)	22 (28%)
My sexual attraction constantly changes	10 (13%)	59 (74%)	11 (13%)

The quantitative data suggests that respondents understood that bisexuality has the unique position of sitting between the two binary poles. Furthermore the respondents

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did not simply fit into communities because of the changing nature of their sexual attraction. The fitting in was done in order to not cause a disruption, as it was easier to disguise their sexuality rather than label themselves as bisexual. Recent research in New Zealand by Henrickson (2007) has indeed suggested that it is often easier to be religious and non-heterosexual rather than non-heterosexual and religious, as hiding or at least shielding sexual identity from everyday religious life is easier. Several life-story accounts support this argument. Ruth was an interviewee from London who had recently converted, along with her father and male partner, to Roman Catholicism. She attended regularly and enjoyed the communal aspect of his religious life. However, she allowed the community to assume that she was heterosexual and had never publically 'outed' herself within a religious context. The presence of her male partner on Sunday mornings meant her sexuality was presumed. Cornelius, whose sexuality has been discussed previously, occasionally attended his local Roman Catholic Church with his male partner. Cornelius allowed the congregation to assume that his partner was a friend as they knew about his wife. If the congregation ever confronted him, Cornelius emphasised that he would have to leave, although he stated that such a thing seems very unlikely:

> I can't imagine the Catholic Church getting so involved. If it wasn't an issue, no-one would say a thing. If I forced it to become an issue by taking my partner to Church...and again its something I would do on occasion if he wanted to come, just to be with me at Christmas and Easter. And quite a few people do bring partners who are non-Christians to such festivals. But I doubt there would be any intervention like that, any intended intervention. I can't imagine it.

The respondents who actively played down their sexual selves often celebrated the flexibility (other words such as fluidity or flexibility were interchangeably used) of bisexuality both in terms of gender and the fact that bisexuals have the potential to fit into both the heterosexual and homosexual social spheres. This alarmingly seems to confirm some of the fears from lesbian feminists who claim bisexuals still have heterosexual privilege (Wilkinson 1996) and can appear heterosexual in situations which may provide difficult when identifying as bisexual. On the other hand bisexuals are seen as people unwilling to be fully homosexual (Anderlini-D'Onofrio 2003), and therefore can move if the wish into homosexual sphere, particularly in terms of socialising and access to the 'gay scene'. The quantitative data shows that this flexibility was known by a convincing amount of the respondents. As previously mentioned 20 respondents felt that they enjoyed the flexibility of bisexuality and the fact that they could choose which community to be part of. However, it should be made clear that of the 20 interviewees only Adam and Michael fits this schema completely. Although most respondents enjoyed the potential flexibility, it appears that only a few actually act upon it. Within the 80 questionnaires however, the percentage of those presenting these types of definitions was slightly higher and more common in female respondents (10 of the 15 who wrote about this). This has been discussed by Diamond (2008) who argues that it is easier for women to do bisexuality or flexible sexuality in general as discussed in the previous chapter.

The Pressures of Religious Scriptures

The chapter now moves to explore how religious texts put strain upon sexuality and the ways that sexuality is adjusted in order to fit. It is not accurate to assume that

because of the Churches focus upon sexual behaviour the respondents didn't read the Bible. That is to say, the respondents' didn't see the Bible itself as entirely harmful. Furthermore, there was no real suggestion that the Bible independently made the respondents reconsider their sexuality. In general the respondents saw the Bible as wholly compatible with their lives.

Table 4: The importance of the Holy Bible (N=80)

Statement	Strongly agree/agree	Strongly disagree/disagree	Unsure
The Bible is compatible with modern life	44 (55%)	11 (14%)	25 (31%)
The Bible is often misinterpreted with regards to sexuality	65 (81%)	15 (19%)	0
The Bible is negative towards non-heterosexual relationships	46 (58%)	15 (19%)	19 (24%)

Further to this quantitative data 38 (47%) of the sample stated that 'Bible Study' was an important part of their faith. The statistics show a number of things. Firstly, the Bible is still a valid religious text within modern society. Furthermore however, the Bible itself needs to be treated with care because it has been misinterpreted to such a degree that it is seen as negative towards anything other than heterosexuality. It was apparent that in general the respondents saw the Bible as more vital than actually attending Church as there is clearly a disjunction between those who attend Church and those who use the Bible.

Table 5: Church attendance N=80

Weekly (or more)	27 (34%)
Monthly	4 (5%)
On special occasions	23 (29%)
Never	20 (25%)
Total	74 (93%)- 6 (7%) did not respond

Further to the table above 50 (63%) stated that regular Church attendance was not necessary in sustaining ones beliefs. Much more emphasis was placed on the Bible over the institutional Church or organised worship of any sort. 37 (46%) stated that Bible study was important in supporting beliefs, with 39 (49%) being unsure. This perhaps shows the move to a more individualised or personalised faith where the individual is free to re-interpret key texts. The Bible was treated seriously and respondents' offered at times highly detailed interpretations. Even during other answers, interviewees referred to the Bible and it became apparent the huge role it played in their lives. The Bible acted as a guide both morally and spiritually and as an example of the ideal way to live one's life (using the example of Jesus). Rather a guide to be interpreted but not to change sexuality. This quotation from Hope a 29 year-old from the North of England eloquently summarises the idea of using the life of Jesus as a guide:

> To me, what is important is what Jesus said and what Paul said is to be respected and looked at, you don't know what the culture was of that time, what the sexuality was it was completely different, there was a lot of homosexuality in the temples a lot of older adults

to younger persons...I find it so upsetting that the Anglican Church is so divided over this issue which to me, reading the gospels, doesn't seem to be a concern for Jesus. Jesus is concerned about people being kind to each other and not judging each other, and loving each other. That is what I aspire to be, what I want to be. People who do this anti-homosexual stuff I'm suspicious of, whether it's about religion or it is about bigotry.

By focussing upon the New Testament the idea of Jesus as an activist and a bringer of social justice came to the fore. This has been previously suggested by Yip (2003) in his study of gay Christians. Specifically Yip argues that his respondents (93% of the 565 respondents studied through his national survey in 1997-98) called for the Church to realign its focus towards 'responsible behaviour and justice to individuals, rather than the acceptability of particular kinds of genital acts' (Yip 2003:62). The key issue for my respondents seems to be that the Bible is open to interpretation and it is your right as a Christian to make the Bible your own. Therefore, to make it clear, I am saying that the respondents in general were not directly affected by the Bible and they did not behave a certain way or re-address their sexual self-definitions because of the Bible, but it was something from which they drew inspiration.

I do read the Bible yes and it is important in all aspects of my life...But it is for me to study and to take issue with, I want to be the one exploring it not being told about it. There is so much of worth in there but it takes time to see what it means in relation to your own life... (Samantha)

This quotation, from Samantha, a currently non-practising Anglican highlights a strong interpretive aspect of modern Christianity which is rather liberal and embraces plurality and flexibility. However, to tell this story only would not be giving a full account of the respondents, particularly those who were Evangelical. The Evangelical respondents noted that for them the Bible was the world of God and therefore directly influences the lives of those who adopt the denomination.

> The Evangelical group [that she attends] believe their Bible to be infallible and their interpretation of that was that homosexuality was wrong, not like having inclinations but in practice... it's not just that they take a more literal view of the Bible, but it's their little view of the Bible. I mean its not that I got automatically thrown out, because I came out at the end of the summer term, and got given the summer holidays to think and pray about it all. So I did. And I spoke to people who knew in-depth the Bible from both sides and neither side convinced me, and I was like, well doesn't that say something. Doesn't it say that if it was clear cut then clearly it would be clear cut, but it didn't? So I went back to them and said, look the Bible could be interpreted as saying both things, and they were like no (laughs) we believe the one interpretation. (Delilah)

Here Delilah effectively sums up the debate for many Evangelical bisexuals with regards to the Bible. For more conservative Christians the Bible plays a central role not only to their religious life but to their life in general. Therefore, how one interprets the Bible has a wide reaching impact. Delilah argues that because of a more literal interpretation her acceptance and further participation within the Church falters. The issue for her seems to be not just how the Bible is interpreted but whose interpretation is adopted.

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NEGOTIATING FAITH

Having explored how the respondents reshaped their sexuality in the light of their faith, the chapter moves to explore the respondents who kept sexuality as the core identity and fit faith around it. This seems to have been the most common response. I suggest that there are two ways the respondents did this: To re-conceptualise Christianity by starting a process of individualisation with regards to their faith, and to actively challenge their faith and expose what they saw as flaws in the belief-system.

Firstly, the re-conceptualising of faith and how respondents re-evaluated what it meant to be a Christian in light of their sexuality by starting a process of individualisation. How this is done will be explored in the following section.

Individualisation and the Turn to Life

Do bisexual Christians represent a move towards spirituality or more accurately what Heelas (2005) calls 'theistic spirituality'? Or do they represent a religious individualism (Roof 1999) or what Woodhead and Heelas (2000) and Woodhead (2001) have called the 'Turn to Life'? As discussed in Chapter 2 the 'Turn to Life' reflects a turn to making religion fit with life today and asking how religion can improve your life. This has resulted in a more personalised form of Christianity which is malleable and considers life experience in shaping faith. Christianity in this respect is an active process rather than a given. This

section explores what respondents did, either consciously or unconsciously to their spirituality in order to be both bisexual and Christian.

Firstly, the respondents thought that Christianity is about spiritual exploration and personal reflection rather than understanding God as a supernatural entity. As previously discussed the more officious side of Christianity was often downplayed. 64 (80%) of the respondents agreed with the statement that faith is sustained through 'Personal spiritual exploration'. Furthermore, 59 (73.8%) agreed with the statement that spirituality is about 'Personal spiritual exploration'. This shows a move away from a more tradition type of Christianity as taught through sermon. However what does 'personal spiritual exploration actually mean'? For the majority of respondents it meant flexibility with the Church's teaching and a greater freedom to believe and do what felt right to the individual in question. This was done by asking the question 'does this feel right for me' and then adapting it. Adam, an interviewee, makes this point:

So I'm thinking how real is all this to me. Looking back over the course of my life there have been instances when my religion has come and gone, I'm not sure if this is any different really...but that is what is important, it must speak to me.

Personal spiritual exploration represents seeing Christianity as an active process rather than a passive and learnt process, in which individuals are able to decide what their own faith means to them. 59 (79% of the 77 who answered) stated that it is a central part of their spirituality.

Bisexual Christians it would appear are practising what Roof (1999) has called religious individualism. For Roof (1999) religion is constructed using three things: scripts,

practice and agency. Similarly to Woodhead (2002) it is argued that although scripts (the Bible) and practice (Church) remain important guides it is the human agent who builds a belief system which fits with their own life.

An area that distinguishes bisexual Christians from other non-heterosexual Christians and highlights religious individualism at work is the role of gender in relation to religion. Respondents' argued that Christianity was built upon the idea of the polar opposites of the sexes. Therefore bisexual individuals, at least using this very narrow framework, reside somewhere in the middle. For bisexuals it would seem that there are no Christian guides or blueprints to follow because of lack of bisexual Christian role models. As I have argued this is also apparent within sexual communities. Unless bisexual Christians choose to adopt an inaccurate sexual identity then they are stranded within a void to which they have to ascribe meaning:

> In terms of my religious community it's a limbo…It's either one of them or none of them. (Daniel)

Daniel's rather despairing summary was common throughout the data set. Here he talks of the fact that within his religious community his sense of identity is rather lost because of the difficulty aligning bisexuality with other sexualities. He suggests further that this is different to the challenges to gay men (to use his example):

> People can understand gay men because it's the complete opposite of straight men and sometimes I do call myself gay because it makes more sense...to me and others. But what of bisexuality?

Daniel leaves the question unanswered because it is something which is in a state of constant negotiation. Bisexuality rejects monosexuality and this is bound up with all variety of preconceptions about sex and gender. In a Christian context respondents' often paid serious attention to their roles within a monosexual heterobiased society.

The second major distinction between gay and lesbian Christians once again is linked to gender make-up but in direct relation to Jesus Christ. The respondents' saw themselves more truly aligned with Jesus as they reject monosexuality (the attraction to members of only one sex) and they are freer to engage in gender play due to their unique position. This is direct evidence of religious individualism at work. They argue the life of Jesus reflects openness with members of all sexes to which they aspire and also flexibility in terms of gender which they have special privilege over because gender plays such an active part in the lives of bisexuals:

> Jesus is something to aspire too and how he was with people, his followers...he didn't see men and women differently or anything like that...that's what bisexuality is like... (Samantha)

How does this religious individualism or the Turn to Life manifest itself in the lives of bisexual Christians? This is perhaps best understood through the statistical data.

54% of the sample attended Church only on special occasions or not at all (25% of the entire sample). Coupled with this was the figure that 35% of the entire sample did not belong to any official denomination. It is my assertion that those who neither attend nor affiliate have doubly rejected institutionalised Christianity. They have moved away from the need to re affirm their spirituality with others in a congregation and denied the need to belong to collectivised group of Christianity. Furthermore they have moved away from the nuances of denominational belief-systems which may have once underlined their faith. Indeed, the interviewees show also that these boundaries are open for negotiation with individuals who continue to identify with a denomination but no longer hold the values key to that belief-system. Jim, a Methodist stated:

> Although no longer attending…I'm a Methodist. There are peculiarities about what [I] believe which must on some level be Methodist and different from others…but I don't take it all…just the bits I want. (Jim)

Cornelius as a Roman Catholic furthers this:

> I won't shy away from doing it I don't think [telling his congregation about his sexuality]. And if people don't like it then tough really, if they give me a hard time then maybe I'll have to re-consider my membership to that church, maybe it's not the church I think it is. Because I think it's a most unusual kind of Catholic Church that I go to because it isn't the straight down the line orthodox kind of church, there are a swathe of views at the church, which is nice. It's a church with a lot of younger people so I think I'd be ok.

This quotation, in addition to showing that the Christian faith is not viewed as rigid, highlights the very real distinction between official standpoints, e.g. the ideas and practices devised by the church authorities passed down to the local level. Although this will be discussed further in relation to official church documentation in the final data chapter the issue here is that individual churches all have subtly different belief systems and worship styles.

For the majority of respondents this dissonance between the church and individual beliefs was a constant struggle and presented a life-long challenge. It would seem that the religious experience craved needs to resonate with individual experience or moral standpoint. Some respondents were prepared to engage in this challenge whilst others were not. This personal dimension of faith has been much discussed in the work of Heelas and Woodhead (2005) and also Yip (2003) and Wilcox (2002) and has far reaching consequences. Yip for example sees that adopting a 'positive personal approach' (Yip 2003) is vitally important in the lives of non-heterosexual Christians. If there is no resonance with personal experiences then individuals are unlikely to feel comfortable in that situation. Heelas (2002) particularly argues that the move to more individual religion in the form of either the New Age or what are more broadly labelled as 'spiritualities' has occurred due to, amongst other things, a shift towards the need to religion that does something for the individual. A religion that reflects our personal identity and allows us to access our true 'selves':

> …the typical aim of (many) theistic spiritualities of life is to 'give up' or 'surrender' one's fallen or imperfect self…in order to let the Holy Spirit 'take up residence'. (Heelas 2002:370)

Heelas has pushed this further with the idea that spirituality has taken a 'turn to self', as alluded to in the above quotation. Due to the requirement of individuals to access what he calls the 'HS factor' (the Higher Self factor) (ibid.) the aim of such spiritualities is to allow access to a 'higher plane of being' (ibid). The Holy Spirit resides in the individual making them the centre of the belief-system. This does not fit with the experiences of bisexual Christians in that although God was mostly felt internally. The respondents often enjoyed their own interpretations of what religion should be all about, and it is evident that in general respondents used the Church and Christian scripture as a basis for their faith. In other words all of their 'spirituality' had an undercurrent of traditional Christianity. As Lynch suggests within his work on Post-Evangelical Christians the line between self-spiritualities (spiritualities constructed entirely by the self) and religion is often blurred. How removed individuals are from traditional forms of Christianity is often questionable (Lynch 2002). He uses the example of the 'Mosaic' Church in the US which meets in a night-club. Although on the surface their worship strategies are rather non-traditional, their beliefs are highly traditional. They firmly reject such things as sex outside of marriage and non-heterosexual relations/relationships for example (Lynch 2002:44). As previously mentioned (on page 204) Michael a 27 year old male from the Staffordshire area practiced what could be labelled as 'alternate' worship styles. As previously mentioned (see quotation on page 205). Michael has an altar in his room which he uses to perform his own rituals. Although his style seems rather radical and alternate, using Lynch's framework there is a suggestion that he shows little movement away from a traditional understanding of Christianity. Beaudoin (1998) has suggested in his study of Generation 'Xers' that such a move away from traditional modes of worship represents the current generation's suspicions of institutions:

The scepticism surfaces most acutely in regard to those who purport to be looking out for the generation's good. As the self-appointed guardians of Xer's- and all souls- religious institutions are therefore frequent objects of GenX criticism. (Beaudoin 1998:52)

Although such generalisation is heavy-handed, there are some resonances here. Respondent's suggested that their relationship with God needed to be based upon personal meaning as Lynch asserts:

…rather than seeing absolute truth as something that is easily and immediately accessible from the pages of scripture, or Evangelical books or sermons, a post-Evangelical perspective sees the pursuit of truth as a on-going process of trying to establish personal meaning in response to the Christian tradition. (Lynch 2002:39)

On a basic level Michael's worship-style represents a distancing from truths established by others. Riddell et al (2000:62) suggest this allows individuals to 'draw their own meaning, rather than attempt to proscribe the meaning that participants draw from the worship through sermons of statements by worship leaders'. The very fact that Michael has personalised his worship style shows he is actively trying to re-evaluate what these symbols mean to him. Although he uses the altar mimicking the traditional Christian service, he is the one using the altar and not a member of the clergy, challenging the relationship between himself and the divine. Furthermore he is challenging the role of the clergy here and the role they play as messengers of the word of God. Yip has labelled such

a technique as 'attacking the stigmatiser' (Yip 1997) and highlights non-heterosexuals' tendency to question and therefore mistrust the views of the clergy. Michael alludes to this:

> I have here with me a type of Christianity that works for me and I do not need to go to church…I have everything that I need…God is in my heart…I know what he is to me and what he means to me and nothing else matters…it's about feelings isn't it. I feel that the relationship I have with God is right. No priests…I have cut out the middle-man. I really cannot see any point of it at all, no point. The priest is supposed to be a messenger or a guide or something…if you really think about it…why? Is he some sort of chosen person or…what gives them authority just because other men have blessed them, I just don't buy it. (Michael)

Michael here is showing his wariness of the clergy to deliver the word of God to children. Such anti-authoritarian rhetoric is rife in New Age literature. Take for example David Icke, ex-footballer turned self-appointed prophet, uncovering the true mechanisms of government:

> The new spirituality involves a one-to-one relationship with the Godhead and the higher intelligences. We will no longer believe that our sins can be forgiven by a priest appointed by the Church hierarchy. Why do we need a human to arbitrate between ourselves and God when we have our own personal link? (Icke 1991:127)

If you push this further, as Heelas has suggested, there is a tendency to statements such as these as suggesting that God is the 'self'. In other words our spirituality comes entirely from within rather than accepting outside influences. Heelas calls this 'self-spirituality' (Heelas 2002). However, there is little evidence of such activity in my sample due to the underlying Christianity of the respondents.

The data seems to suggest that the respondents are in fact practicing what Heelas terms 'theistic spiritualities of life'. Although informed by Christian teaching, practices and ethics the self was the filter for this information. Christianity was understood as something which must enlighten and assist the respondent's life. Heelas summarises theistic spiritualities of life thusly:

Theistic spiritualities of life thus combine or mix the traditionalised (the authority of tradition) with the detraditionalised (the authority of one's own spiritually informed experience). (Heelas 2002:366)

This combination approach is a good way of showing how the respondents understood Christianity and how they created their faith. One respondent, Jim seems to demonstrate this rather well. Jim had become disillusioned with the church after what he called a 'revelation' during his years of study at University. Although no longer attending service and participating in communal readings of scripture Jim studied the Bible himself, therefore eliminating the communal aspect of Christianity whilst still theologically engaging with Christianity.

I take the bits from the Bible and things I read…study texts and things…and do with them as I please. (Jim)

Respondents actively took on board traditional practices and personally edited them, using Christian tradition within their personalised spiritual space.

Although the 'turn to self' theory does not apply to the sample, bisexual Christian theology represents a 'turn to life' as suggested by Woodhead (2001), Heelas (2002) and Heelas and Woodhead (2005). Taking on board the discussion in the previous section it is apparent that what bisexual Christians are in fact doing is consistent with this idea.

The 'turn to life' has at least three aspects. Firstly, that belief is filtered through the self, a personalisation of beliefs. Although 'tradition, creed and ritual may be useful, it is ultimately *I* who have to give them authority in my life' (Woodhead 2001:113). Secondly, there is also a turn towards seeing spirituality as being able to improve life and to access a state of higher consciousness. Woodhead terms this as both the 'turn to my life' and the 'turn to this life'. Furthermore there is another possible dimension which is oft overlooked, the turn of 'Cosmic' life. Woodhead suggests that 'the turn to life moves out from the self to a universal and unifying force which is believed to animate all things' (Woodhead 2001:112).

The turn to life emphasises the more individualised and arguably less altruistic nature of spirituality in contemporary society. The individual is the one who gives life to beliefs and ideas. Yet the idea does not abandon the influence of outside forces. Bisexual Christians do this through necessity in order to keep their religious self without losing their sexual identity or being forced to adapt their sexuality. To use Woodhead's framework, I argue that bisexual Christians have adapted their spirituality (in general rather than their

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sexuality) and used Christian traditions as a base from which their personalised faith grows. The Christian faith, including scripture, does not know bisexuality and what it does know of bisexuality is either false or based upon generalised conceptions of bisexuality as adulterous or sexually adventurous. Therefore the respondents' took what fits with their own lives and adapted this. To avoid further confusion the Church itself was often removed from the equation allowing direct access to God rather than interpretation and representation. Furthermore, bisexual Christians saw faith as an interactive process and as a way of bettering themselves through their religion. There was a general feeling that the organised Christian Church focuses upon controlling the masses rather than enhancing individuals. This is in direct conflict with what could be called the bisexual ethic. For a good number of the respondents' their sexuality was a way of bettering society by calling into question gender divides and the differences between the sexes, the more radical formation of bisexuality. Respondents' therefore wanted their spirituality, which was often as (if not more) important to them, to reflect this quest to make themselves and society better. This may seem overly grandiose but this is often the way respondents' linked their sexuality and spirituality together.

Questioning Religious Authority

Having explored how the respondents' tackled the internal struggle of their belief-system, the chapter moves to look at the negotiations which take place on a public level. Here the negotiations which take place in regard to religious authority and the questioning of scripture are the focus.

The respondents openly questioned the relevance of authority in Christianity. Such questioning was aimed at either the Church itself as an authority figure but also the leaders of the Church. The key idea that emerged from the data is that the respondents in general did not trust the clergy or their special relationship with God. As I have shown in the previous section, religion for the respondents was a much more individual project and therefore the role of a third party would dilute and pollute the pure relationship which they sought with God. I have previously shown that Church attendance and organised Christianity were not significantly important, but here this is furthered by a suggestion that having clergy is in some way fundamentally flawed. The individualisation project is so personalised that it needs the full concentration of the individual without interference from the Church.

The story of Eleanor is most interesting here, as a Church attendee she struggles with the role that the clergy play:

Yeah I do [talk to the priest] but I don't think we get on really [laughter]. I just don't like the idea that he is guiding me because he could be guiding me to places that I don't want to go. Like what happens if he tries to convince the congregation that gay people are wrong? That's a bad example...but you know...if God speaks to him I want to hear what God says not what he thinks he said.

Here Eleanor is outlining her struggle with accepting the word of God as interpreted through another human being. This is something that she developed later in the interview:

At the moment I just attend to be somewhere holy and to be somewhere to pray. I prefer it when there is no-one around. The Church doors are pretty much always open and I go in and smell the smells and feel the atmosphere...it just feels a good place to be. That gives me time to be with the God I know, not the one I am told about.

Eleanor here talks about the God she knows as the one that she wants a relationship with. It would seem that she wants a relationship directly with God and not through the lens of the clergy.

This perspective is most prevalent in those who do not attend Church, and often the idea of the clergy stopped some respondents from attending Church at all:

Well I never attend Church if that's what you mean. I probably couldn't get over the way I was preached to at primary school...it's not important though really I don't think. I can't understand why the priests have such a monopoly over faith and the way that we relate to God. (Jim)

It would seem from the data that there are several reasons why the respondents question religious authority. As Jim suggests above, the clergy are perceived as being the experts and infallible with regards to religious knowledge. As Jim continues:

How do we know it is true, what they tell us? We have no way of knowing about from trust and faith. But I want to have faith in God and not faith in my priest.

The respondents therefore are questioning human nature and the tendency of those in power to deploy such power in a biased fashion, rather than attacking an inherent corruption within the clergy. There is a distrust of everything that is not personally witnessed or experienced in modern life where we are encouraged to question everything. This is evident throughout the life stories of the respondents. As they often perceive the Church as not accepting towards bisexuality it is perhaps unsurprising that bisexual Christians question everything about Christianity. The respondents focussed most of their dissatisfaction upon the Bible and understandings of the Bible. This issue was more complicated because it was seen as an unmoveable facet of Christianity. Church attendance and an engagement with clergy were not seen as a central tenant in Christianity and therefore negotiation was more straightforward.

Questioning Religious Scripture

Previous literature focusing upon the dissonance between bisexuality and Christianity has tended to focus upon the tensions between the self and religious authority, including scripture (Kolondy 2001, Reasons 2001, Udis-Kessler 2000) and has seen the Bible as the main cause of conflict. However, literature concerned with gay Christians has called for non-heterosexuals to re-assess traditional interpretations of the Bible in order to fit this with their sexual identity (Thumma 1991, Wolkomir 2001). Although covered in the literature review it is worth re-introducing it here. Yip has termed the technique of re-interpretation of the Bible as 'Attacking the stigma' and offers three main components to this: (a) questioning traditional interpretations of the Bible, (b) focusing upon other Christian values and teachings rather than sexuality and (c) challenging the context and

compatibility of such passages (adapted from Yip 1997:117-123). This is developed further by Yip in 2005 where the strategies are divided into defensive, offensive and creative approaches to scripture. Here the suggestion is that non-heterosexual Christians (and Muslims in this example) use defensive methods to positively re-interpret the Bible: (a) attempting to expose the inaccuracy of traditional interpretations and translations (b) questioning the cultural context in which the scripture takes place in comparison to modern society. They use offensive methods to: (a) challenge hegemonic religious structures (b) relocate the self as an interpretative authority. Finally they use creative methods to: (a) 'Out' the texts, uncovering the non-heterosexual connotations of the book (b) 'Befriend' the texts, re-casting the texts as 'gay' friendly(adapted from Yip 2005:52-54).

This is echoed in Thumma's work on reconciling Evangelical and gay identities. Thumma suggested there are three stages in such a process: Firstly, convincing gay Evangelical Christians (in this instance) that it is permissible to alter your belief system within the Christian framework. This is followed by a re-evaluation of Christian doctrine and an emphasis on teaching the 'true' meaning of the Bible. Then finally integrating the new identity through interaction with other Evangelicals and general social interaction (Thumma 1991:339-341).

The argument that the Bible has been interpreted incorrectly was common throughout the sample. Joseph a 52 year-old Anglican discusses the idea that the Bible has simply been misunderstood in regard to non-heterosexual relations:

Sodom and Gomorrah, the sodomites. That story has nothing to say about gay people at all, it's about people who are out of control and will rape anything, male or female, just to have a good shag and anything is game for it. (Joseph)

Yet he is also rather sophisticated in his analysis of the Bible, returning back to the original translation issues to enhance his argument:

Leviticus is more interesting, the passage 'a man shall not lie with another man it is an abomination', the original Hebrew word Aribar which literally means the opposite to that which is good. I think that is an important consideration for a gay person to at least think about. It seems like a ban presumably on anal intercourse, but I don't think in any way it is a ban on relationships between men. The way I see it, it also says a man shall not lie with his father's wife, which is his mother...what strikes me is that you needed to have a set of laws like this and the people who were reading this had no sense of boundaries whatsoever, anyone was fair game for a shag. (Joseph)

It is clear that Joseph has taken considerable time in studying scriptural evidence and actively looking for alternate meanings. Such a thorough approach was not shown throughout the sample with respondents tending to focus upon the context or cultural incompatibility of the Bible compared to contemporary society. This usually began with an attempt to dismiss the Old Testament as an out-dated an irrelevant text, and an effort to discard the Old Testament as somehow less important that the New Testament:

Well, yeah, but the New Testament supersedes the Old Testament. I think. Because if we are going to take all those things from the Old Testament, as valid today, oughtn't we keep all the others? Ought we to not be eating meat and milk on certain days? We ought

to just be eating kosher food. And keeping all those laws. Whereas, the New Testament fulfils the Old Testament, doesn't it, it does in my view anyway. (Cornelius)

Here Cornelius is addressing things which he considers as inconsistent within the Old Testament. He suggests that because we have abandoned so much of the teaching in the Old Testament should we not just abandon it all? Coupled with this there is an emphasis upon the life and work of Jesus Christ. The word of Jesus was given prominence over others:

Jesus doesn't mention sexuality, he mentions sexual immorality and things like that and I think hurting someone sexually whether that's by adultery or rape or something like that. And Paul...I'm not saying that I'm totally right...but there are lots of things that Paul says to do that Christians don't do, like the women are supposed to cover their head in Church...there's a whole list of things. To me, what is important is what Jesus said and what Paul said is to be respected and looked at, you don't know what the culture was of that time, what sexuality was...it was completely different, there was a lot of homosexuality in the temples, a lot of older adults to younger persons. (Hyacinth)

Hyacinth sees the teachings of Christ as the guiding light in Christian life. The values and lessons from the New Testament are those which she hopes to adopt in her life:

...I find it so upsetting that the Anglican Church is so divided over the issue which to me, reading the gospels, doesn't seem to be a concern for Jesus. Jesus is concerned about people being kind to each other and not judging each other, and loving each other. That

is what I aspire to be, what I want to be. People who do this anti-homosexual stuff I'm

suspicious of, whether it's about religion or it is about bigotry. (Hyacinth)

To return back to Yip's (2005) approaches, he argues that respondents were often

unwilling to be so reserved, showing preference to a more offensive approach. This is a

response to the fact that bisexuals feel that the Bible has been used as a weapon against

them. The respondents' were convinced that the Bible was being actively used against them

to negative effect:

Table 6: Statement: The Bible is used as a weapon against equality for bisexuals
N=80

Response	Total	Percentage (%)
Strongly disagree	4	5
Disagree	5	6.3
Not certain	19	23.8
Agree	43	53.8
Strongly agree	5	6.3
Did not answer	4	5

Here the focus is to actively project one's own understanding of the scripture,

rather than taking a secondary role and criticising the interpretations of others. To use the

third approach outlined by Yip they creatively reinvent the Bible. This can lead to radical and diverse theological positions:

> ...the participants launch and offensive against religious authority structure and figures, so as to discredit their credibility and moral authority, and in turn weaken their discourse. Underpinning this approach is the argument that the engagement with texts cannot be separated from the power behind the interpretation and propagation. (Yip 2005:54-55)

Here, respondents: (a) question the heterosexist bias in scripture, (b) use themselves as the interpretative measure of the scripture (c) adopt a creative approach. This may involve: 'Outing' the texts as containing passages which re-affirm non-heterosexual living, or 'befriending' the texts and seeing Christ in particular as a saviour to marginalised people (adapted from Yip 2005:54-59).

My research into bisexual Christians suggests several similarities with this particularly with regard to point (b). Respondents felt that their own lives did not fit with Biblical accounts, and they were unapologetic about this and did not feel that they should change. Rather the Bible (or more accurately traditional readings of the Bible) is at fault.

> If you take the whole thing to be the word of God then I struggle with that really. It needs to be read a bit more intelligently. If people take it like that because it's easier then fine, but there are things that contradict. For me as long as I'm in a relationship that agrees with the principles of being kind and so on then that is good enough. (Hyacinth)

Respondents selectively used the Bible; discarding aspects which they felt were incompatible or alien to them. Wilcox has called this the 'Bible Buffet' (Wilcox 2002), and has shown it to be a common strategy used by non-heterosexual Christians. However, it is the 'creative' aspects or (re)-interpretation where bisexual Christians set themselves apart and once again this is done with particular reference to the life of Jesus Christ. Respondents saw Jesus as a role-model for what it means to be bisexual in terms of gender and in how one relates to members of any sex. Richard was a 45 year-old Anglican man from Southern England who talked of how he viewed his sexuality as God-given. This type of argument could be loosely labelled as 'ontogenetic' in that life was created by God from one single entity (a single individual organism, this entity then evolves and all life comes from it). Therefore, Richard's argument is that as a bisexual man he came from the same place and matter as any other person and is therefore no less of a person in God's eyes. Indeed Richard pushes this further to suggest that in fact he is blessed as a bisexual because his gender identity allows him special privileges:

> My job as a carer, I go to people and help them out maybe for a short time and maybe for a long time, if it's a long time it could be years, a short time could be days or a couple of hours. That is how my faith comes into play. It's one of the things I tend to think that I do quite well. But I'm not a Church leader, and I wasn't that good a missionary when I did that. But I'm good as a carer because I am using my bisexual, my female persona at times as a God-given gift, and then at times I will use my male side. (Richard)

Michael also makes the link between Jesus and bisexuality:

> I'm in a funny position...sexuality wise and I have taken my calls from Christ. He was open to members of all sexes and all genders and that informs my sexuality...I think...I think there is a good comparison. (Michael)

This type of argument will be problematic for a good deal of theorists in the field of sexuality and social construction (Weeks 1986 is an example). Richard is simply re-enforcing biological differences between men and women and refusing to recognise gender as a man-made construction formed by and through interaction with society, distinct from biological sex. However, Michael pushes this into further radical territory, aligning this sensitivity with Jesus' depiction in the New Testament. When asked about the statement above Michael cagily expanded his answer:

> It is because of Jesus that I study the Bible. The way he lived...it should inspire us as Christians and I think there are definite bisexual undertones...not sexually...I'm thinking in terms of way people should relate and interact......the way that I do my relationships and I am with people is much more open; there are no dividing lines between people of different sexes... (Michael)

From this I take that Michael is proposing a more radical framework for bisexuality beyond sexual relationships and behaviours, suggesting that bisexuality is further reaching that this. It is apparent that one technique used by bisexual Christians in to let the Holy Spirit 'take up residence and to align themselves with the teaching of Jesus Christ and the Gospels, focussing upon his life and values rather than engaging with the Old Testament.

SUMMARY

Although this chapter is neatly divided into Negotiating sexuality and Negotiating faith, in the reality of the data these two were not mutually exclusive. That is to say, respondents usually did not completely re-conceptualise their sexual identity because of the pressures of their religious faith. In practice these both worked alongside one another but to differing degrees. The respondents' sexuality was made more complicated through a de-sexualisation process in attempt to adjust the focus of the Christian Church away from sexual behaviour, and there also seems to be a challenge to the nature of friendships and romantic love. It is however apparent from the data that it was more common for respondents to set their core identity as their sexuality and then try to fit their Christian identity around this. This meant that there was almost always a re-evaluation of what it meant to be a Christian and what Christianity meant to the individuals. I have argued in the chapter that the work of Woodhead (2001) and Roof (1999) is vital to understanding the respondents' approaches. The Turn to Life effectively theorises how the respondents understood their faith and Roof's (1999) idea of religious individualism or 'Lived Religion' shows that although what bisexual Christians are doing is not unique perhaps the pressures of both their sexuality and spirituality mean that these processes are clearer in bisexual Christians. I have argued that in line with Bauman (1993) and Giddens (1991) the respondents see their religious life as a life project negotiated through human agency. Although what Roof calls scripts and practices are still important it is the self who constructs the belief system.

CHAPTER 7: BEING BISEXUAL AND CHRISTIAN IN THE SOCIAL WORLD

INTRODUCTION

Having explored the various ways that bisexuality is self-defined and the impact that spirituality has upon this and upon itself, the thesis moves to look at what these definitions mean in a wider societal context. There are three overarching aims here, which represent the sections of the chapter:

1. To explore what bisexual relationships are and how they work for my respondents.

2. To see how the respondents used support networks in relation to their identity construction and management. What role do the support networks play in the lives of the respondents?

3. To locate their identities in religious space and explore how this affects' their social lives. What type of Church life exists for the bisexual Christians' who told me their stories? The chapter concludes with a brief section taking into consideration all the chapters and examining how in practice the respondents reconcile their sexuality and spirituality.

RELATIONSHIPS

In order to fully understand what the respondents' mean when talking about their sexuality, it is important to move away from internally constructed self-definitions to more practical aspects of how respondents did their sexuality. Relationships are the most obvious and common way in which individuals express their sexuality. However, what must be remembered is that 39% of the entire sample was single so there is a consideration of what it means to be bisexual and single. Furthermore, being single may be both involuntary and voluntary. It is important to ask whether there are reasons relating to sexuality as to why respondents were single? Also in this section there will be an exploration of the role of gender in the lives of the bisexual Christians in the sample. It is important to explore the differences between male and female respondents, asking why the journey appears to be easier for women. The focus throughout is the tensions that exist between the personal constructions of sexuality and the reality of living in a society which is underpinned by the notion of monosexuality.

Monosexuality and Monogamy

Monosexuality is often taken for granted within society by those practising it as it refers to the sexual attraction to members of only one sex, regardless of the sexuality of those involved. Therefore, both heterosexual and homosexual men and women are monosexual. This sets bisexual individuals apart from both heterosexuals and homosexuals.

Bisexuals are 'people whose common characteristic is their refusal to practice gendered exclusivity' (Rust 1995:241), in that bisexuals do not practice monosexuality because of the fact that they are potentially attracted to any sex.

It has also been suggested however that the assertion that society is intrinsically monosexual is a perpetuated myth. Through an analysis of cyberspace Kaloski (1997) has attempted to explode the idea that society is intrinsically monosexual. Kaloski (1997) argues that in fact within Western society through the internet and Virtual Reality (she uses the example of LambdaMOO an online chat-room/community) we crave to dismantle such rigid gender and sexual structures. When given true freedom she argues, we in fact act outside of society's constraints and presumptions. Ultimately she is arguing that this is how we also are in reality.

Yet such an argument seems to be contrary to a wealth of knowledge particularly the work of Rich (1994) and the idea of compulsory heterosexuality where heterosexuality is forced upon people (women) by dominant forces in society (men). With reference to my research, Rich's ideas suggest that we are not free to shape our sexual selves because of the oppressive patriarchal nature of society. Such an argument not only denies difference but undermines the historical struggle which still divides society today.

However, in relation to bisexuality the picture is far more complex. If heterosexuality is set-up as the norm within society and homosexuality as the other, there is little room for those who are attracted to both. It would be possible to argue that the respondents do not always theoretically reject the idea of monosexuality, because their relationships themselves are always gendered. Although this is probably a consequence of the fact that the respondents were also Christian, they in general were gender exclusive unless they were single.

I cannot ever imagine being with two [partners] because when I am with my partner it is because I am attracted to her, what she looks like and how she is with me...and with others I suppose. It's not like I am ignoring this stuff it is just I will only be with that person (Samantha).

This is different to monosexuality. Although the respondents were involved in monogamous relationships the following relationship could be with a man or a woman. Again to use Samantha's story.

It's like anyone I would imagine...I'm not going to cheat but whereas straight boys look at girls I look at both, that is the difference I suppose.

Such a response is common place and it can be therefore safely assumed that to be bisexual is to reject monosexuality. As Rose points out:

I like both men and women; I will think about both...you know...if I am thinking about relationships or just meeting people. Even fantasies, there may be times when it is more likely to be a man I'm thinking of, but there will be times that it is a woman I am thinking of. Not because I can't make up my mind though.

It has been argued that one of the main resistors to accepting same-sex couples into the Church is the fact that they cannot get married, or fully blessed in a religious context. Rogers (1999:22) argues that the only reason that celibacy must be practiced is that there is no alternative to marriage for homosexuals. Hanigan (1998) has also explored the moral implications of marriages at Roman Catholicism, arguing that marriage lies at the very centre of why non-heterosexuality is considered unacceptable.

Although advances in policy have allowed civil partnerships or even limited same-sex blessings for homosexuals, it would appear that there is still a marked legal and spiritual difference between the two. Of the entire sample only two respondents were currently married (although several had divorced) and only three respondents were currently joined in a civil partnership, furthermore two of these were involved with each other.

Yet the 'coupledom' ideal is replicated by bisexual Christians who construct their relationships in-line with this model, therefore playing down the importance of non-monosexuality. Although the respondents had the potential to be attracted to members of both sexes, in reality this is not really evident in their lives (through the data) as this is negated through the practice of coupled relationships. Therefore they are not doing bisexuality to its full potential, or in other words reaching their full bisexual potential. Such a statement is highly loaded. For example, do bisexual individuals have to constant have to re-affirm their sexuality by seeking both male and female partners? Furthermore, does this diminish their bisexuality? From my research it could be argued that it does not. Of the 80 respondents who took part only ten (8%) were in relationships with more than one partner. There is a trend throughout the data to reject any suggestion that the respondents' needed to be sexually involved with members of both sexes simultaneously. Of the interviewed respondents (20) only two had more than one partner. The respondents argued that they were monogamous and did not feel the need to engage with members of both sexes.

Although this seems to go against recent research (Klesse 2009) this links with their Christian values.

There are elements of this sentiment throughout the other 18 life-stories that I collected. The examples of Jim and Michael are representative:

I suppose so apart from if you have multiple partners and then you are stereotypically bisexual [in response to the statement- there is no specific behaviour that is bisexual]. Someone who was like that though could never be accepted by the Church. For me thats a bit of a horrible situation really, either to blend in or to stand out but not seen as being bisexual enough. But I don't agree with the idea that you are enough of a bisexual. I may either be with someone of the opposite sex or same-sex but that doesn't mean I'm...any less bisexual. (Jim)

The best way that I can answer is that bisexuality is not about promiscuity, the Church misunderstands what it means to be a bisexual Christian. I have loving relationships monogamously…perhaps it is easier for me to reconcile this in this way because I'm playing at being heterosexual in this way (long pauses). It's not about being free to do whatever you like, breaking down boundaries of injustice and gender relations (laughs). I've just learnt somehow that I'm attracted to both sexes and it's just me and I am able to choose my relationships each time whether they are men or women, just not at the same time. (Michael)

Dollimore (1996) criticises the notion of bisexual desire as unworkable, as I have previously mentioned. Yet this suggests that in order to be bisexual one must be attracted

to people in equal measure at all times and be torn between heterosexual and homosexual desire. Theoretically this is an understandable misconception because if an individual is attracted to both the same and opposite sex then this attraction must be the same as heterosexual and a homosexual (using Dollimore's framework). Yet this is not how bisexual attraction works. Take for example this scenario outlined by Jim:

> When I'm involved with a girlfriend I am not thinking about what I'm missing from male company…it's not like I cannot be aroused if I don't have both.

Female respondents also discussed this:

> …sexual attraction is not split for me and it is not as if I'm attracted to all men and to all women, it's more complicated than that and it's something I've been struggling with. (Rose)

Jim is stating here that when he is in a relationship, no matter what sex that partner is, he gets what he needs from that partner and he does not think about what he might be getting from a male partner. Rose's statement approaches this in a different way, denying that sexual attraction works by dividing male attraction and female attraction. Although struggling with this aspect of her own sexuality Rose is suggesting that just because potentially she could form a relationship or be intimately involved with members of a either (or any) sex, her sexuality does not work like this either. For my respondents their bisexuality did not have to be satisfied at all times. It was not necessary to feel both

male and female affection or to give such affection. As previously mentioned in personal, private understandings of bisexuality, there are other factors which seem to work alongside physical attraction and whether appearing utopian or not it would seem that the respondents in the research did pay more attention to this upon initial relationship formation. However, most importantly in terms of physical attraction the argument does not seem to be that the respondents were capable of being attracted to anyone at all because physicality is of no importance, which would play into the hands of Dollimore's critique. Attraction is clearly based upon conscious (or possibly unconscious or instinctive) choices made regarding the potential partner. Put simply there are certain gendered traits which play a role in attraction. Samantha, a 19 year-old from Manchester said the following:

> With men you want the masculine things, it is this masculinity that is attractive...wider strong shoulders and a hard body. Yet for a female partner you want the feminine things, and I'm talking about stereotypical things here but I want a woman that looks like everything I think a woman should look like. Soft skin, curves and the like…

This is in line with my previous research (Toft 2005) which shows that bisexuals do not see everyone as potential partners and such a statement is both damaging and a perpetuation of an out-dated myth. This misconception however is entirely understandable. Bisexual individuals argue that for them there are numerous other things which play a greater part in relationship formation (spirituality, sense of humour for example) and this tends to have a de-sexualising effect on people where sameness takes precedent over difference. In other words in suggesting that 'one falls in love with the person' leaves

people open to the suggestion that everyone is a potential partner, which as Dollimore points out is problematic if not entirely impossible.

Relationship Types

A common misunderstanding regarding individuals who adopt a bisexual identity is that they desire the intimacy of both sexes, which ultimately leads to unfaithfulness. The House of Bishops re-considered the issue of bisexuality in 2003 yet inevitably reverted to its conclusions from 1991. They concluded that because bisexuals reject the idea of monosexuality, relationships would have to result in infidelity (House of Bishops 2003:282). However in reality this is not the case. Of the sample 47 (59%) were in monogamous relationships as previously discussed, of these 47 eight had been with the same partner for more than 20 years and 15 for more than five years. Clearly these are not the statistics which represent a set of people who are uncommitted and fleeting in their desire.

Of those in relationships seven were involved with two people simultaneously, and one respondent 'Daniel' who had a small group of partners. All these extended relationships were carried out in the open and were negotiated between all the partners. Although it would have been possible to lie on the questionnaire there is no evidence to suggest that respondents withheld information such as having extra partners who were unknown to other partners. Apart from the rather tragic situation that Cornelius found himself in. Cornelius' wife was suffering from a terminal disease which had in turn made her unresponsive and unable to care for herself. Cornelius had taken a male partner without his wife's knowledge yet it was impossible to explain to her because of the illness.

This was a rather tragic exception to the general rule which I think does not strictly equal infidelity.

The sexuality of partners was an interesting statistic as it shows that bisexual Christians do not just get involved with other bisexuals (Christian or otherwise).

Table 7: Respondents' sex and their partners' sexuality (N=80)

Respondents' Sex	Partners' Sexuality (previous partner if currently single)				
	Heterosexual	Homosexual	Bisexual	Other	Never had a partner
Male	16	10	5	1	1 (Adrian-F1)
Female	21	7	9	2	1 (Sara-S1)
Totals	37	17	14	3	2

The table shows the sex of the respondent and the sexuality of their partner. However, there are only 73, this is due to the seven respondents who had more than 1 partner. These results are complex so they have been displayed on the table below for clarity.

Table 8: Sex of respondent and partners' sexuality for polyamorous respondents.

Respondent ID and Sex	Sex and sexuality of partner (not married unless stated)	
	Partner 1	Partner 2
Richard- C1- Male	Female heterosexual	God!
Cornelius- K1- Male	Female heterosexual (wife)	Male homosexual
Simon- M2- Male	Male homosexual	Female bisexual
Riley- P2- Male	Female heterosexual (wife)	Male homosexual
Daniel- S2- Male	5 male homosexual partners	
Pat- T- Female	Male heterosexual	Female bisexual
Iris- X2- Female	Female homosexual	Male bisexual

Only 14 (17.5%) of the sample were currently in a relationship with another bisexual. Ten of these were women whilst five were men, showing a slight difference in gender. However, the majority of respondents were in relationships with heterosexual men or women.

Adding further complication is the sex of the partners. Daniel (S2), who also took part in the interview stage, had a group of 5 other men who he socialised with either independently or as a group. Daniel was involved sexually with the entire group and the members of the group were involved with each other, although this was never explicitly discussed. Although this shows that there are exceptions to the rule it strongly shows that

the idea that bisexuality must involve members of both sexes simultaneously is a false generalisation.

Conversely, it is also apparent that polyamorous relationships are common in the lives of bisexuals. It has been suggested elsewhere (particularly in research conducting in the US) that in bisexual relationships polyamory is rather common (Lever et al 1992, Weinberg et al 1994). It is also extremely diverse in how it works in terms of the 'number of partners, degrees of closeness and commitment, legal relationship status, constellations of genders, social identities, household forms, parenting arrangements and so on'. (Klesse 2007:77). Klesse's work on polyamory is the most complete and important contemporary piece of research conducted regarding polyamory. With regards to bisexuality Klesse (2007:78) recognises that 'non-monogamy is a troubling issue for many bisexuals, because dominant discourse constructs bisexuals as non-monogamous *by necessity'* (Emphasis in original). Klesse, unlike my research, uncovered a strong streak of needing polyamorous relationships in order to maintain a bisexual identity (ibid), in line with Eadie's (1996) assertion that monogamy destabilises bisexuality. Klesse also finds that women often suffer from what one of his respondents calls 'Hot Bi Babe syndrome' where promiscuity is taken as a given and this leads to concealment of sexuality. The debate as to whether bisexuals *need* to be polyamorous is on-going. My respondents suggest that it is possible but an overarching generalisation cannot be made. Although in behaviour all but three of the 20 interviewees were monogamous there were others who desired multiple partners. The overall picture seems to be effectively summarised by D'Onofrio:

> Bisexuals can definitely be as monogamous as anybody else, but the good news is that they don't have to in order to be honest with their partners and create responsible love relationships considerate of each participant's feelings. (D'Onofrio 2004:3)

She continues however to proclaim the values of non-monogamy:

Polyamory and bisexuality propose a plurality of love, both in the number of partners and genders thereof. This return to plurality of polytheism involves a certain primitivism, the feeling of the cosmos pervaded with magic...Why restrict the number of partners to one if we can love many as intensely and honestly, as erotically and spiritually, as in a flamboyant romantic tale? (D'Onofrio 2004:5)

This rather romanticised framing of polyamory harks back to a more natural or more uncorrupted society, hailing bisexual polyamory as the true form of sexuality. This is a rather naive position. If reverting to a primitive state in terms of sexuality is the right thing to do then murder, incest and public humiliation, all features of man's primitive age should be normalised. Such an argument is too contentious and cannot be the defence for bisexual polyamory.

Klesse's formulation of polyamory is more complex. Polyamorous relationships are responsible, organised, loves (polyamory is from the Greek meaning many loves), yet he emphasises that polyamory is not a 'unified discourse' (2007:112) as people give it different meaning. It is important here to note the work of McQueeney (2009) who argues that monogamy is a result of individuals (in her research this was black lesbians) replicated monogamy because of the implication that this was the Christian thing to do.

Single Bisexual Christians

It is entirely possible for someone to call themselves bisexual yet never to have had relations with members of either sex or a member of a particular sex. Individuals of course can be single by choice or single because of lack of opportunity or being unable to find a suitable partner(s). Indeed the qualitative data suggests that being single, bisexual and Christian is a common occurrence. Samantha was a 19 year-old who had never had a serious relationship yet she knows that she is bisexual.

> I've never been involved with...another girl, only fumbles at Uni. But it's something I know about myself through private thoughts and from things I've read.

It would seem for Samantha that actual involvement or behaviour plays only a small role in determining sexuality. Delilah takes the issue further with the example of her male partner. Although appearing to be heterosexual and having the opportunity to step aside from any negative implications of identifying as bisexual, Delilah chooses to be 'true to herself' (to use her phrase) and call herself bisexual. She maintains her sexual identity even when it would be easier to do otherwise.

> Like by the looks of things, it looks like I'm in a heterosexual relationship at the moment. But I don't want to put away my bisexual identity, it something important and something that I've fought for, and I don't want to lose it.

Of course there is a limit to how much one can stress their sexuality and there are only a limited number of opportunities which arise to discuss sexuality with other people. Sexuality is a rather private matter and with bisexuality it can be hidden. It can be hidden either when involved in a relationship with a member of the opposite sex when assumptions of heterosexuality are made, or when in a relationship with members of the same sex and these assumptions become those of homosexuality. These assumptions may never be vocalised and therefore cannot be defended or rebutted by individuals. Yet it was not uncommon in certain situations for my respondents to use this flexibility to their advantage within their religious lives. Cornelius had been involved with his Church for a substantial amount of time and had attended with his wife since their marriage 20 years ago, as his wife illness worsened Cornelius began to attend Church with her male partner knowing that the friendly congregation would know of his wife's illness and assume him to be a friend. However, Cornelius' male partner is not religious and the deception is not a common occurrence. However, it does highlight the flexible nature of bisexual relationships and in a society which only really understand one or the other it is difficult to grasp such flexible without seeing it as deceitful in some way.

SUPPORT NETWORKS

This section continues on from the one previous in that there is a focus upon how sexuality is affected in relation to wider society. Having explored relationships, what effect did support groups have upon respondents' sexuality and spirituality? Before tackling this question however, there must be a consideration of how support groups were used

and their place in the lives of bisexual Christians. This will help to contextualise their experiences.

Bisexual Christian Support Networks

There are currently no official support groups/networks within the UK specifically for people who are both Christian and bisexuality This is mainly due to the alliance of bisexual Christians with other non-heterosexual Christian groups such as Quest (for Roman Catholics) and the LGCM (Lesbian, Gay Christian Movement). This consolidation has added power and focus to the movement, rather than constructing a smaller bisexual Christian movement. This meant that respondents could not be simply recruited from support groups. However support groups/networks are vital in the lives of those who possess sexual identities which are not considered the norm within that society, as Klesse points out:

> The maintenance of stigmatised relationships depends on emotional and material support. Because queer relationships have been discouraged and stereotyped as pathological, the development of a culture of support has been as essential goal of sexual movements (Klesse 2007:83).

Having said this, the respondents were not as positive about support group/network attendance; only a rather paltry 33% attended (or had ever attended). Of these around half took part in bisexual groups where the focus was upon bisexuality and

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issues facing those adopting a bisexual identity, and half attended Christian groups usually in the form of the Church. The use of the Church as a support network was particularly evident in the respondents who belonged to the MCC. Respondents were rather ambivalent about the role of support and in general had little to say. They were unclear of the benefits of attendance and rather dismissive of questioning about their use of such groups or networks. The respondents were also reluctant to answer the pre-determined statements about the roles of support groups. To summarise:

Table 9: Respondents' Opinions on Support Groups/Networks.

Statement	Number (and %) agreeing or strongly agreeing	Ambivalent or no response (due to non-involvement)
Support groups create safe environments	32 (40%)	44 (55%)
Support groups help you keep up with events	32 (40%)	44 (55%)
Support groups help you to form intimate relationships	16 (20%)	45 (56%)
Support groups promote activism	20 (25%)	34 (42.5%)
Support groups aid socialisation	19 (23.75%)	49 (61.25%)

The table shows that the splits between those agreeing (and strongly agreeing) and those disagreeing (and strongly disagreeing) seem to suggest that there is not an overwhelming opinion about the role of support groups/networks. There is not a common

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trend in the responses. The role of support groups is therefore unclear, however, I intend to argue that support groups were important but traditional community support was less so. Therefore in the next section the focus shifts to an exploration of alternatives to such support groups.

Alternatives to Support Groups

It is evident that the attendance of organised support groups was not a high priority. However, respondents often skipped the question on support groups and I followed this up during the interview stage of the research. Kimberley was a 29 year-old ex-Methodist who no longer attended Church. In the questionnaire she stated that she did not attend support groups/networks but she met regularly with a small group of people to discuss issues and to socialise. When probed during the interview about her socialisation and recreational habits she said:

> And then I met up with a woman who had been through similar life experiences to me, and she introduced me to an organisation for people with similar life-stories to us, and they had a very strong mission statement, saying we don't accept racism, homophobia, prejudice against disabled people, and I feel like I've found a real Church. Somewhere where I recognise the God people are talking about, and there's no official Church setting, there's no communion, no of the usual accompaniments to Christianity. It's more about having a meal together or just being at the end of the phone. Or sometimes we might organise a fun day where we all go to the beach. Sometimes, people will just sing songs that come into their head, Christian songs, sometimes I feel like I should go to a

proper Church every Sunday, but I think I meet with more Christians now than I did in Church, with more people that I recognise.

The quotation shows that Kimberley did in fact take part in a group from which she took some sort of emotional support. However, it is the term support which seems problematic as it denotes a problem which needs fixing. In general the respondents shied away from any suggestion that they were not coping with their sexuality and/or faith. Jim seems to summarise the position of the interviewees in general:

On the questionnaire I said that I don't attend support groups because I don't, I talk to my girlfriend or my family [interviewer prompt- is that not a form of support?] No it's just what everyone does I don't think I should have to go to some weird group full of people who are different.

Although explained rather bluntly by Jim, this shows that Jim has further problematised the term support to include support group. Samantha also had a similar response when I questioned her avoidance of support groups/networks:

I don't need support, I really don't. I go out and meet people and I socialise with Christians through my family but that's just to meet people. No-one needs to fix me.

Although not going as far as Jim, Samantha once again is focussing upon the negative implications of the term 'support'.

Weeks (1996) talks about the role of community within the lives of gay and lesbian people and the positive identity affirmation that arises with community involvement. However, the respondents were rather more informal about creating these connections, relying on informal meetings rather than structured groups/networks. Socialisation in the form of going out for a drink or a meal for example takes precedent over attending an organised group of even Church. Weeks' suggestion that the role of communities is to enhance identity is a good one. I previously introduced Kimberley and in her life-narrative there was tension in the fact that she no longer attended Church. For her Church attended was a re-affirmation of her religious identity but it came second place to feeling like a hypocrite and attending a homophobic Church. This once again shows a struggle in adopting simultaneous bisexual and Christian identities and there was often a trade-off in respondents' priorities. If support was sought for religious reasons, sexuality became a private matter discussed between friends and family. This was also evident amongst those who attended bisexual support groups, which are often characterised as being atheist in nature. Indeed there are in fact communities (virtual) for atheist bisexuals and non-heterosexuals (see GALAH www.galah.org). Respondents in this scenario worked on their bisexual identity and kept their religious beliefs to one side.

As Blasius (1994) points out, being involved in a community is not about simply meeting other partners. My data shows this to be the case with bisexual Christians, it is a way of gaining support, friendship and acceptance.

However, the two (organised groups and more informal groups) are often combined. One respondent, Adam spoke of how he often went for a drink with his local priest:

The vicar who was there when I went there, he and I became close friends, I toyed with coming out to him time and time again. We would go once a month for a couple of pints in the pub, and it was 2 or 3 hours of solid nattering. Initially it was a chance for me to unwind but after a while he said it was a chance for him to let his hair down as well, with someone who he could natter to easily and because we got on so well a bit of me was dying to be more honest with him, and another part of me thought do I need that sort of risk because we had talked about gays occasionally and he wasn't totally anti, but I got the impression that he was towing the semi-Church line if you like.

Further evidence to suggest that support does not have to come from networks concerned with sexuality or religion comes from the fact that most respondents simply used their friends or family. I returned to the issue a second time during the interview with Jim to see if he could shed any more light on the issue:

No I didn't go to any groups it's just not me. I've got friends who swear by talking to people and going to all sorts of group activities and expeditions and so forth. But it's such a personal thing religion that when it's combined with my religious beliefs it's kind of messy and I wanted to work through it by myself. I did talk to partners about things though because that's just what you do isn't it, but it's not really a support group or anything I don't think, it's just how people are…a support group is just so negative like I

can't deal with things myself…your religion and your sexuality are at your very core aren't they it's what makes you what you are…(Jim)

The quotation highlights a common theme throughout the data when respondents talked about their involvement with support groups/networks. It is the feeling of social connectedness that is of most importance for the respondents, if this is present then they have all the support they need. This is however, done through a variety of methods. For example those who are involved in organised religion stated that they got enough from the Church primarily because of the community aspect and the feeling of togetherness that the Church gave them. 18% of the entire sample said that involvement in their Church offered them adequate support. Those who were more heavily involved in the Church extolled the virtues of the being involved with a group of people with a similar goal in terms of their religion. Such Churches however, need to be inclusive to give their congregation the support they need:

> You'll find that different pastors say different things because that is where they are
> coming from and what their community needs. They need to understand that people are
> involved in developing their spirituality rather than...you know...within that you can offer
> support to specific areas, but it's gone so far past that. It came out of Stonewall and the
> gay issues and black issues in America a few years ago. But it is time to move on and say
> what do we really need. We need a Church that is wholly inclusive, that will accept the
> single mums, the travellers down the road, you don't have to wear your pearls, you come
> as your whole sexual being and spiritual being to worship God, and gain support from
> within and teach from within as well. We have people who don't know anything at all
> about the sex issues or the diverse issues that are faced by bisexuals so we teach about

this rather than having an exclusive group for bisexuals that does not educate...that would be my ideal Church (laughs). (Cynthia)

Such a scenario seems perfect, yet the delicate nature of being bisexual within a Christian context (or vice-versa) means that both identities are often privatised rather than celebrated within society.

The section concludes with an exploration of whether there is a need for a UK based bisexual Christian group, what would such a group achieve and are the needs of bisexual Christians significantly different to warrant such a group. More importantly perhaps, is this something that respondents actually wanted?

The Future for Bisexual Christian Support

It is evident that on the analysis of the quantitative data support groups/networks were not the highest priority for bisexual Christians. The respondents are less reliant on formalised structured support mechanisms, tending to construct safe personalised groups based around friends and family and in a few cases their churches (particularly MCC members). But were respondents therefore calling for specific bisexual Christian support space? Of the entire sample 80% (64) stated that they did not attend support groups/networks for bisexuals. Furthermore, 78.8% (63) said that they did not attend support groups/networks for Christians. However, the respondents seemed to suggest that they would welcome more support groups for bisexual Christians as the following table appears to show.

Table 10: There needs to be more support for bisexual Christians.

Response	Number (N)- 80	Percentage (%)
Strongly disagree	1	1.3
Disagree	4	5
Not certain	15	18.8
Agree	51	63.8
Strongly agree	7	8.9
Did not answer	2	2.5

The data does not seem to be entirely conclusive one way or the other. The respondents did feel that bisexual Christians needed more support, with an overwhelming 72% agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement. However, this is not backed up by attendance at any sort of group level. From the qualitative data it would seem there are numerous potential reasons for this which work alongside the fact that support groups/networks for bisexual Christians are not readily available. Firstly, as previously mentioned the respondents' preferred more informal support space and therefore would like to construct smaller more relaxed networks. Also there has been a stigmitisation of the word 'support' which respondents denoted to mean that they needed help. However, there are also more political and practical reasons for not attending and developing a community. In developing a small bisexual Christian community power is diverted away from the

lesbian and gay Christian movement which is a powerful political force. As Rose points out:

> I'd prefer it to be honest if we grouped together, we're all facing the same oppression and people say there aren't many bisexual Christians, and there probably aren't, so what difference can we make (Rose).

Although the sentiment behind Rose's argument seems to be one of collaboration and jointly fighting a common oppressor, my research shows that homosexual and bisexual Christians are not playing with the same set of cards. Bisexual Christians are facing a different (although admittedly related) type of resistance from entering the organised Church and the problems that the pose they Church are distinct. Therefore in aligning themselves with lesbian and gay Christians, bisexuals are not only diminishing the chance that they will ever be fully welcomed within the Christian Church but also skimming over issues which they need to challenge the Church on.

CHURCH LIFE

For religious individuals a large part of their social interaction occurs within the Church and/or the religious community. How does this work in relation to being both bisexual and Christian? Firstly it is important to consider what sorts of practices occur and what Church life consists of.

Church Practices

The respondents' in general practiced what could be seen stereotypically as 'traditional' Christianity in that they often attended Church weekly. Of the total sample (80) just over a quarter (29%) attended Church on a regular weekly basis. If regular Church attendance is taken as meaning at least monthly attendance, then almost half of the sample (46%) were regular Church goers, underlining the fact that it is not impossible to be bisexual and participate in Church services.

Table 11: Church attendance

Answer	Number (N)- 80	Percentage (%)- (rounded to one decimal place)
A few times a week	4	5
Weekly	23	28.8
Fortnightly	6	7.5
Monthly	4	5
Only on special occasions	23	28.8
Never	20	25

Table 11 shows that respondents have not completely abandoned institutionalised religion. Inclusion within religious space or a community of others was cherished by the participants and was an integral part of their belief-system. This is shown in the willingness of the respondents to engage with church activities beyond that of attendance at weekly service. Almost one third of the sample regularly participated in Christian events such as funding-raising, coffee mornings or Bible study groups during the week. It would be unrealistic to conclude that this communal aspect of the faith is the driving factor behind sustaining ones' spirituality. Seventy percent of the sample stated that for the 'Personal Spiritual Exploration' (exact phrase used in the questionnaire) was the main way to worship or re-affirm beliefs. However, this was often coupled with Church attendance. Furthermore, it is apparent from the quantitative data that the issue of Church attendance was more difficult than respondents simply refusing to attend because of the Churches seemingly less than positive attitude to bisexual (and non-heterosexual) issues. The majority of responses did not even concern sexuality as a factor which pushed them away from the Church. Rather, due to the pressures of modern life respondents had to construct more practical means of worship, usually private and with no regard for strict time-tabling. Church attendance was combined with other Christian activities such as Bible reading.

It is perhaps surprising however that the Bible was not more of a central part of the respondent's religious lives, especially when all of the interviewees spent time discussing how they interpreted the Bible. However, 66.3% (53) stated that they did not set time aside to read the Bible. This jarring suggests that although the Bible is considered it is not the central tenant of the bisexual Christian belief-system, rather it is a side-piece to other practices. Furthermore, the communal aspect of religion seemed to be downplayed throughout the data. 88.8% (71) of respondents said that they did not attend groups or classes within the Church itself. Christianity is traditionally seen as communal religion and

this is clearly discussed in the New Testament. For example Acts 15:30, when Paul and

Barnabas arrive in Antioch and gather the congregation to deliver the letter from

Jerusalem. Also there is a history of using the congregation as a place to discuss issues and

problems as in Corinthians 2:6ff where issues of discipline are discussed with the

involvement of locals. However, bisexual Christian practises are clearly less communal,

only 15% (12) of the entire sample stated that they attend Christian groups which are not

organised by the Church. The extra Church activities which the Church provides are also

not seen as important as the table below seems to suggest:

Table 12: Is it important to be involved in extra church activities such as fund-raising?

Response	Number (N)- 80	Percentage (%)
Unimportant	52	65
Not certain	15	18.8
Important	10	12.5

The communal aspect of Church is therefore replaced either with family or

friends as the coming together of individuals to worship and to support each other is seen

as a Christian thing to do. However, in contemporary society this has clearly shifted from a

rigid social institution where Christians attend organised worship at least on a weekly basis,

to a more flexible fluid version of communal worship. This reflects a loosening of

traditional structures as theorised by many contemporary writers (e.g. Giddens 1991, Beck

1992, Bauman 2001). Indeed Bauman would relate this to the individualisation process. He

suggests a shift away from institutions that until recently we were entered into simply by birth. It is therefore 'the emancipation of the individual from the ascribed, inherited and inborn determination or his or her social character: a departure rightly seen as a most conspicuous and seminal feature of the modern condition' (Bauman 2001:144). Yet the individualisation thesis as formulated by Bauman suggests instability which seems to contradict this need for community and the closeness of others. Bauman suggests that:

> …if you wish "to relate", to belong for the sake of your safety- keep your distance; if you expect and wish for fulfilment from your togetherness, do not make or demand commitments. Keep all the doors open, all of the time. (Bauman 2004:29)

Here the suggestion is that in liquid modern society we need to be wary of making such commitment and that the ability to move on from social ties is most valued. However, in terms of religious practices and the construction of religious identity there seems flaws with such an approach, which Bauman himself recognises. He surmounts this need for community with the rise of fundamentalism as a response to the anarchy of liquid modernity. In a society rife with choice, close-knit fundamentalist communities offer family-like warmth (Bauman 2004:47).

Being Bisexual in a Religious Community

Although there was a clear link between sexuality and faith, almost 20% of the sample did not feel the need to 'do' their religion as bisexuals. They were not consciously

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known as bisexual individuals. Furthermore, over half of the sample stated it was unimportant to be out within their religious community. In other words they did not worship as bisexual individuals, they worshipped communally as human beings. This seems rather problematic as there seems to be a divide amongst the sample with regards to practicing faith with regards to their sexuality. Twenty-five of the 80 recognised that both sexuality and spirituality were important in informing faith but were unsure of whether this needed to be a part of their religious worship.

The practices of bisexual Christians are more private yet influenced by Christian teaching. For example 84% of the sample thought it was important to put time aside to pray. But this was often combined with less strict practices which are taken from other religions or less mainstream forms of Christianity. For example, meditation which is taken from Buddhism and 'silent time' which is the main form of worship for the Society of Friends (Quakers):

I think about stuff a lot, usually when I drive to work, or if I'm out in the countryside walking. Yeah, that sort of thing...I suppose it could be called meditation...when I think deeply about spiritual things. (Cornelius)

I basically put aside an hour a day for meaningful time...its like a relaxation time where I sit...perhaps with candles and so forth...sometimes I will have music...the candles aren't important either really, none of it is really...I just need a space to be alone with me and God and to think about the correct thing to do…the Christian thing to do…it's a reflection on the day and on the things that are going on in my life…I think its just a chance to take the outside world away…to take my life outside of itself…to look at

something more important and clear…that's it exactly…clarity…I just need to put aside society and look within me to find God and to talk to him without any sort of outside influence…any noise…any sort of disruptions or anything like that. (Michael)

The following table shows how important private prayer is in the lives of the respondents.

Table 13: Is it important to put aside time to pray on a regular basis?

Response	Number (N)- 80	Percentage (%)
Unimportant	2	2.5
Not certain	10	12.5
Important	67	83.8
Did not answer	1	1.3

Leaving Church Life

One fascinating group of respondents and interviewees is those who no longer attend church and here I intend to focus upon how they have come to the conclusion that they do not need or should not need to attend. There are links here with several previous arguments such as the 'turn to life' particularly with regards to the ideas of Woodhead (2001) but I wish to concentrate on why bisexual Christians have consciously decided not attend church and their reasons for doing so. As discussed previously, Christianity as

taught through the church is seen as not an accurate representation of contemporary

Christianity. The very dynamics of the Christian faith are questioned and what Christianity

is all about. This is discussed in the 'Christian beliefs' section of the previous chapter.

However, what other reasons exist? I have discovered several other explanations as to why

bisexual Christians no longer attend. Further to this I also intend to show that there are

other reasons which do not play a part in non-attendance. The reasons for not attending

can be split into two areas: reasons formulated due to pre-conceptions about what the

church expects and reasons formulated due to actual rejection from the church.

This section will deal firstly with ideas which are pre-conceptions or do not

require experience from the individuals. There are certain aspects of Christianity which

respondents felt were incompatible with bisexuality and this would lead them to be made

unwelcome within a religious community. The issue of marriage in particular was a concern

for all respondents and the fact that they could not conclusively state that all bisexuals

should get married due to extended relationship structures for example. The respondents

themselves were unsure of the outcome of making marriage open to all:

Table 14: Christianity would be welcoming towards bisexuals if they were allowed to marry in Church

Response	Number (N)- 80	Percentage (%)
Strongly disagree	6	7.5
Disagree	9	11.3
Not certain	37	46.3
Agree	18	22.5
Strongly agree	3	3.8
Did not answer	7	8.8

Although the statistical data is rather unclear due to the majority of respondents selecting the 'not certain' answer, there is a definite suggestion that it is an issue for the respondents and this was explored further in the interviews. Erin was a 31 year-old female from just outside London who was in a civil partnership with her female partner. For her, the civil partnership was important in terms of publicity and making a positive step in the right directions. However, she combined this civil partnership with a blessing in her Church:

> We went through the whole thing of whether we should hold on for when they are the same thing [to marriage] and equal...but it was a big thing and I wanted it to be seen that our relationship was blessed by God. (Erin)

Alongside this Erin wanted to make the point that they had support for their relationship and mimicked the traditional church service in the blessing.

It was a huge thing to get it blessed and the district church wanted to discipline the guy who did it even thought the URC said they'd do it...But there were lots of people who came, from India and Australia because they said it was right. They needed to be there because it was right...

However, Erin is very unique in her rather courageous fight to have her relationship blessed, as most interviewees saw the churches wariness towards same-sex marriage as a rejection of the validity of their bisexual/same-sex relationship. Erin states that she 'just couldn't wait for the church' and hoped her actions would force change.

For many respondents their resistance to organised faith was born out of a rejection of traditional relationship structures, e.g. a heterosexual married couple. Respondents see their own lives and relationships as second-rate and not good enough for the Christian church. Jim makes this point:

Marriage? That is a tricky one…but the thing I think about is if I have 2 male friends and they can't get married why then should I ever marry a woman? I would be perpetuating these double standards. I'd like to have a relationship blessed by God but I cannot see why every relationship shouldn't be blessed. (Jim)

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Jim is trying to downplay the fact that heterosexual marriage is seen as the Christian ideal and therefore should not a be reason for staying away from church. Respondents did feel however, that bisexual Christians ought to be monogamous as has been previously discussed.

Negativity from the Church

Apart from these pre-conceptions that bisexual Christians hold about Christianity or more specifically organised Christianity, there are reasons which may have been formulated due to actual rejection from organised faith. It should be noted however that few respondents said they had actually suffered negativity from their church, only 16 (19%) of sample. Those who did not answer was told in the question not to answer if they had not suffered any negativity. Table 25 below shows the types of negativity suffered:

Table 15: Forms of negativity suffered

Answer	Number (N)- 80	Percentage (%)
Verbal abuse	9	11.3
Exclusion	3	3.8
Other forms	4	5
Did not answer	64	80

However, it is my assertion that the reasons formulated are far more subtle and perhaps may not detectable through the questionnaire. Respondents were often simply made to feel unwelcome rather than specifically targeted and this was because they were both non-heterosexual (therefore possible to have relations with members of the same-sex) and because they were bisexual (possible to have relations with members of either sex). Respondents were warned that they should only bring partners if they were opposite sex and indeed this is what some did:

I do attend Church, with my boyfriend...that is the lucky thing that he is male. The pastor came and spoke to me because I've spoken to him about sexuality things in the past and said not to bring a female partner...(interviewer prompt)...it's something I'll work around when I come to it. (Delilah)

Perhaps most surprising are the reports from non-attendees who had previously attended an MCC (Metropolitan Community Church). Jessica (who incidentally was the only respondent not to identify herself as White- British) furiously wrote on the questionnaire in response to the question, 'Do you think the church is negative towards bisexuals?'

Yes, absolutely. I recently attended MCC (Metropolitan Community Church) - a gay led congregation. They were totally geared to lesbians and gay men only, and they were also very family orientated. If you had one of the opposite sex, you were pretty much ignored and dismissed. (Jessica)

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The idea that the MCC is a gay support group/network was also discussed by Michael who stated that the MCC was 'not religious enough' for him and that it focussed upon issues of homosexuality rather than inclusive spirituality. Here we clearly get an image of bisexuals being forcibly grouped into the same bracket as gay man and lesbians yet the fit is not a comfortable one. Bisexuals leave the church for different reasons that gay men and lesbians and from the data there are at least three distinct reason based upon: a) reasons of principle (not acknowledging anything other than mono-sexuality and encouraging fixed relationship structures, b) reasons of practice (marriage is couple based, no inclusivity for people with multiple partners, and c) reasons of misunderstanding (seeing bisexuals as having the choice to be heterosexual.

During the initial investigation stages of the research project it became apparent that using support groups/networks as a means of recruitment would not be possible. This was simply to do with the lack of support groups in the UK for bisexual Christian men and women- of which at the time of writing there are none. Like other sensitive research projects concerning sexuality and religion (Yip 2000 for example) it would not be possible to form contacts with gatekeepers and to rely on them to provide respondents for the project. Although it is probable that small unofficial support networks/groups exist, they appear, at least publically, under the radar. Putting this lack of specific support for bisexual Christians to one side this section looks at how bisexual Christians used support groups/networks and the role they played in their sexual and spiritual lives. The first consideration is how bisexual Christians use support networks primarily aimed at gay men and lesbians; these are secular groups where the focus is upon issues of sexuality rather than spirituality. This is followed by faith groups which may or may not be aligned with churches or specific denominations

SUMMARY

This chapter has been an exploration of the impact of social life upon sexuality and spiritual identity. The chapter has explored how relationships, support groups and the Church in particular impact upon the respondents' sexuality. The aim has been to move the study of identity into the social realm beyond the internalisation of identity and a micro approach to a more realistic macro level.

CHAPTER 8- CONCLUSIONS

Being bisexual and Christian involves complex negotiations and is often done in communities in which such identities are seen as unwelcome. This chapter explores the findings of the previous three chapters and how they contribute to the sociological exploration of identity negotiation; the study of sexuality; the study of Christianity and how the research can be used to make recommendations to the Church. The chapter finishes with recommendations for future research. This chapter will summarise the key themes from the empirical data collected and construct new theories from the data which will be of use sociologically.

The chapter is divided into four main sections. The first section will give a summary of the key themes and findings from the empirical data before being explored in full depth in each conclusion section.

The second section will look at the identity stories constructed by the respondents, and how my theoretical framework can be used to explore identity. The focus here is upon the respondents as bisexual Christians and an exploration of how sociologically we can understand how they negotiate their identity. There is also a consideration of the practicalities of possessing a bisexual and Christian identity, focussing upon identity integration and how they actually 'did' their identity.

The third section discusses religious individualism and the 'Turn to Life'. The stories that the respondents told me indicate a high level of personalisation of their faith, with a large proportion of the sample no longer attending Church. The focus of this section is to explore how this fits with the theoretical study of religion.

The fourth section moves towards organised religion and the big overarching question of this study: Can Christians be bisexual? This question which in many ways is the root of this thesis is aimed at the Church. The answer seems to be a loud and clear 'yes', here I will explain the reasons why this is so but also consider why bisexuality remains problematic in reference to the three data chapters.

The chapter concludes with some recommendations for future research and a brief summary.

KEY THEMES AND FINDINGS

There are three key findings from the research project which contribute to the sociologies of identity, sexuality and religion.

1.   Identities are negotiated both privately and publicly. Using Plummer (1996) I have shown how identity is situational and affected by the context in which the identities are being 'done'. In this regard identity is a reflexive choice, but also can never step outside of the boundaries of society. However, the identities are negotiated with regard to 'core' identities (Layder 2000) which create a stable and secure self. With regard to bisexual Christians usually bisexuality or Christianity is the core identity around which everything else is built. All negotiation and reflexivity takes place in relation to this/these core identity/identities.

2.   The data, through the questionnaires and the life-stories presented to me, suggests that bisexuality is misunderstood by society in general and the respondents have shown that this is also the case within the Church. Both are monosexist and heterosexist in their approach to bisexuality and therefore biphobia is widespread and not sufficiently recognised. Bisexuality needs to be considered in complex terms without constant reference to heterosexuality and homosexuality as it is a different form of sexuality. Although diverse, there are common 'dimensions' which inform bisexuality which carry different weights for different individuals.

3.   The respondents highlight individualism in religion and the 'Turn to Life'. Christianity for bisexuals is a much more individual process because of this misunderstanding of bisexuality and the entrenched monosexism and heterosexism bisexual Christians are forced to re-evaluate both their sexuality and religious faith.

Taking these brief summaries forward the chapter explores each of these forward to develop them in full detail. This will be followed by addressing the main overarching question which has policy implications, can Christians be bisexual?

NEGOTIATING BISEXUAL CHRISTIAN IDENTITIES

The main focus of the thesis from a sociological perspective has been the 'doing' and negotiation of identity and the self. The project has treated identity as an ever-evolving story told in relation to the past, present and future, and in regard to the situation and context in which the story has been told. Such a summary seems consistent with the work of Plummer (1995) in the use of scripts which we identify with and tell ourselves and others. However, as Layder argues (2000) there are problems in relying on the authenticity of self-knowledge, or the tendency to treat how others see themselves as how they actually are. A more realistic way of explaining this is perhaps as an 'emergent narrative' as discussed in the literature review. Here I use this idea of emerging self-narration alongside Goffman (1971) and Giddens (1995) to show how identity is contested and negotiated constantly. I will argue that a combination of approaches towards identity theory is most useful. This means that although I recognise the weaknesses in some theories I will refer to them to suggest alternate ways of viewing identity negotiation at work.

Based upon the data collected during the research project and demonstrated throughout the data chapters, I assert that identity should be seen in the following ways: (i) Identity is negotiated both privately and publicly. Furthermore, the context and situation of how identity is 'done' affects such negotiation, (ii) although we are more likely to see identity as a social construct rather than something which is assigned at birth, the data suggests that people have core identities which they rely on for stability and to inform the reflexive choices that they make, with bisexual Christians this is usually either their bisexuality or their Christianity.

The ideas of Goffman (1971) particularly in relation to the analogy of the theatrical performance resonates with the data. The idea of the front and back stage is evident throughout the data, usually in the gulf between what the respondents said about their lives and what they actually did. The front stage is constantly influenced by a back stage which reads the situation and prepares for enactment. The example of a respondent who goes to Church for example but is not out as bisexual in the Church, in order to maintain the front stage negotiations must occur 'off-stage' such as what to say about certain issues, how to relate to other members of the congregation and even how to behave in general. As discussed in the data chapters (particularly Chapter 5) for bisexual Christians this was a much used technique. Often respondents were not out within their religious community and such negotiations took place whenever they engaged with the community. Respondents felt that the Church did not understand their sexuality (and nor did the congregation) and therefore had to construct their identities (or at least their performances) in relation to this.

Often these two conflicting identities mean that the negotiations that take place between the two regions (or stages) are complex. The back story also influences expectations of what negotiations take place, the member of the congregation might expect a certain response from the priest which they have gleaned from official reports, the media or other members of the congregation. The process is of course two-way, the priest may have expectations of the members of the congregation which s/he feels they have to fulfil. There is also a consideration of previous experience and even the previous experiences of others. Has anyone ever told the priest that they were bisexual before for example and what was the reaction? Such information would affect the identity performance even if the reaction was not from the same religious source, if a negative reaction was received from a Christian source in general then this would most likely affect the response.

As Plummer (1995) has also suggested, the situation in which this occurs is also important. The story one constructs or the performance one gives at a wedding compared to a funeral for example, is likely to be different. Similarly the story an individual constructs when she/he is with one other person compared to when they with a group of people is likely to change. This is particularly evident in the lives of bisexual Christians it would seem, and further outlines the differences between theory and practice or what individuals should be able to do against what they actually do. The data suggests that it is often the case the respondents internally believed something yet when they were part of a group such a belief was not borne out.

However, although using both Goffman (1971) and Giddens (1991) here explains how layered stories are created and how these stories are privately negotiated leading to public enactment, they cannot fully explain the nuances of how these messy stories are constructed and how different sectors of identity are given preference over others. Here I think it is useful to use the idea of 'core' identities in the work of Layder (2000). Layder convincingly argues that although it is a modern sociological trend to see identity as entirely flexible it is not in fact identity that is being changed:

> Your personality and social identity is never static, but it doesn't mean you are constantly revising who you are according to how you feel. Just because you adopt a new fashion style or a 'cooler' way of talking doesn't mean that your personal and social identity has substantially changed. These are purely cosmetic or outer changes and more likely reflect other aspects of yourself (your sub-personae), than truly indicate a change in core self-identity (Layder 2000:5)

The idea of the core identity is vital in understanding how the respondents talked about their sexuality and their religious faith. Often one identity took the forefront in order to make sense of everything else in their lives. This is not to say that they were born with a bisexual identity (for example) which affects their worldview. It means that their sexuality (in this example) is so important and fundamental to them and it gives them so much in their lives that everything else is filtered through it. I use Layder to explain this further.

> There is certainly nothing fixed, static or essentialist about self-identity. A person's identity may change in accordance with social situations and circumstances (particularly their current life situation) as well as their own choices and decisions. However, this is not an endless recreation or revision of identity not is it achieved unhindered by social forces. Important transformations in self-identity, when and if they occur, tend to be gradual rather than total, while minor changes are more frequent but essentially cosmetic. It is also possible to have a core self that underpins and co-ordinates the performances or several other personae. But these are not different selves they are simply different facets of the same individual (Layder 2000:159).

This is important in understanding how the respondents 'did' and negotiated their identity. As shown in Chapter 5, the respondents worked on both their sexuality and religious faith in order to make them fit. It is also apparent that the respondents often referred to themselves as either bisexuals who happen to be Christian, or Christians who happen to be bisexual. The work needed to reconcile such identities was often so complex against the misunderstanding and biphobia that the respondents allowed one identity to be at the forefront. This enabled them to have a permanent core identity/identities and then re-evaluate their secondary identity/identities in order for it to fit with their anchoring core

identity. This is rather like when Layder (2000) talks of inventing our own versions of identities. As 'self-directing beings capable of independent thought and behaviour' (Layder 2000:9) who are 'unique with our own set of experiences' (ibid), we can re-evaluate the choices offered to us by society. Therefore there are times when we consider the options and construct identities in relation to society.

My argument is that this core identity is not as readily changeable or open for negotiation as the other identities. Although to some extent compartmentalisation occurs, the core identity will always be present and it will always affect how other identities are presented and how they are negotiated. The core identity is like a filter which affects the way that the other identities are viewed. Private negotiation of identity occurs but is affected by this core identity.

Here is where we have links with Bauman (2004:48) and his analogy of the defective jigsaw puzzle where 'the image which ought to emerge at the far end of your labour is not given in advance, so you cannot be sure whether you have all the bits you need to compose it…'. Furthermore Bauman states:

> In the case of identity it is not like that at all: the whole labour is means orientated. You do not start from the final image, but from a number of bits which you have already obtained or which seem to be worthy of having, and then you try to find out how you can order and reorder then to get some (how many?) pleasing pictures (ibid).

It is incorrect to think of identity as a jigsaw puzzle where all the pieces neatly fit together to reveal the correct image on the front of the box. This is because the individual

who put the pieces together knew the image before attempting the puzzle and they knew that the end-image was the correct one. In reality, we have no idea of the correct image at the beginning or the end and some of the pieces will fit and others will not.

However, although we have choice, changing identity too rapidly or extremely 'would almost certainly raise questions about your continuing trustability' (Layder 2000:16). Having an identity and managing it takes up time and space, if as Layder (2000) argues we adopt too many 'sub-selves' (Layder's term) we run the risk of becoming fragmented, unstable and untrustworthy. We begin to lose a firm basis by which to relate to people. It is impossible to ask a bisexual Christian what it is like to be a bisexual person without grasping that their Christianity will impact upon their identity. Contemporary literature such as Bauman (2004) has tended not to examine how identities work together as identity can be so easily discarded if better ones come along.

Throughout the data chapters words such as negotiation, compromise and reconciliation were common. On a practical level the thesis is concern with how bisexual Christians actually live their daily lives with identities which are popularly seen as conflicting. The integration and reconciliation of identities is a central theme. During the data chapters I detailed the techniques and strategies that respondents used to negotiate their identity. However, is it indeed necessary to reconcile such identities, do bisexuals have to tell anyone that they are indeed bisexual? McQueeney (2009) has argued that black lesbians in the USA did what they could to minimise their sexual identity, putting it firmly in second place to their religious identity. However, previous work has suggested that coming out as bisexual is better for mental health (Corrigan & Matthews 2003). Recent research has tended to argue that coming out for a bisexual is more difficult than for gay men and lesbians. McLean (2007) has argued that for bisexuals the issue of 'coming out' is especially problematic and it is often the case that coming out is not the obvious solution.

As many of these factors exist at a broad societal level – such as the myriad meanings and stereotypes attached to bisexuality – they are very tricky to shift and negotiate. Moreover, the continued uncertainty bisexual people experience makes coming out an especially problematic decision if feelings of confusion or conflict persist. (McLean 2007:164)

This makes reconciliation of bisexuality and Christianity more difficult, and there is evidence as discussed that respondents kept their bisexual lives very separate to their Christian lives for fear of misunderstanding and expulsion. The risks involved in such integration could mean being forced to leave the Church and there are examples of this here. It is less likely however, that they would be asked to leave their religious community or to have relationships ended because of their faith, and there are no examples of this in the data. This however, creates an internal quandary for the respondents as Griffith and Hebl (2002) have pointed out. In their research into gay identity and working life they argue that to be in the closet is to be seen as untrustworthy and dishonest, where a good person would simply come out and bear all. It would be easy to conclude that all the respondents should come out as bisexual and profess their Christianity in order to live honest and fulfilled lives but this is not the case. Not everyone for example, believes that in contemporary society we should be open in talking about sexuality and our deepest sexual thoughts.

Support groups are often used to reaffirm self identity, and research into gay and lesbian Christians has stressed the importance of reconciling faith with sexuality. I used the example of Thumma's (1991) work into gay Evangelicals during the data chapter. Yet the question that remains unanswered is that if it takes such careful negotiation and work to

get sexuality and Christianity to fit is there not a worry that what you are left with is neither sexuality or Christianity, but a watered down version of both? I will explore this more in the final section of this chapter when the focus shifts to poses questions to the Church. However, the concern remains until more positive statements are released by the Church.

UNDERSTANDING BISEXUALITY

The respondents were very vocal about their sexuality and the data chapters highlight this fact. This was explained as being due to the fact that overall sexuality was seen as the most immovable identity in the lives of the respondents. In other words their core identity was often their sexuality with their faith being re-imagined to fit. This in turn meant that respondents used faith as a moral code or guiding light throughout their life rather than something that defined their 'selves'. Therefore it is important to conclude on the findings with regard to the study of human sexuality and specifically bisexuality. The thesis can contribute to the sociological study of bisexuality. Here there are three main arguments: (i) the respondents suggest that bisexuality has been both misunderstood by society and the Church has magnified this, (ii) monosexism and heterosexism have led to widespread biphobia, (iii) the respondents have shown that bisexuality is multi-layered and multi-dimensional, often with individual meaning. The data shows that bisexuality is best understood in terms of the dimensions which make up bisexuality rather than universal definitions.

As discussed in Chapter 6 in relation to the data and in Chapter 2 in relation to the literature, both my respondents and the literature suggest that there is inconsistency

between what bisexuality appears to be (based on the respondents' life-stories) and the picture of bisexuality that the Church constructs through its official documentation, but most importantly through the respondents engagement with the Church. Bisexuality is multi-faceted and complex and therefore when the respondents are told that being bisexual means being adulterous or needing two partners simultaneously, this jars with their actual experience of their own sexuality. What makes it difficult for the Church on the other hand is that bisexuality may for one individual require that they are in a relationship with two people. Yet what remains is that this is not a defining feature of bisexuality, an individual does not have to be involved in a relationship with more than one person to call themselves bisexual. Furthermore, my data suggests that such a feature is rare, although other research has suggested otherwise (Klesse 2007). Such a difference appears to be because of the fact that my respondents were Christian and had the ideal of monogamy ingrained into their personal morality.

This links to the main difficulties that both society and Christianity seem to have regarding bisexuality. Both support monosexuality (the attraction to one sex) and heterosexuality (the attraction to the opposite sex). Such ideas are entrenched and re-enforced throughout society through religion, the media, politics and social institutions. The idea that heterosexuality is seen as the norm and this is actively encouraged is best discussed by Rich (1994) in the sociological sense yet evidence surrounds us through less formal examples. Monosexism and the biphobia that comes from it, on the other hand is specific to bisexuals because it refers to the intolerance towards people who are attracted to more than just one sex and therefore is not a problem for lesbians and gay men or heterosexual people. The data suggests that respondents felt monosexism is the biggest challenge they face in their lives. As discussed in Chapter 5 strategies were often constructed in order to down-play the sexual side of the respondents, moving the focus of

their sexuality away from their romantic physical love towards more general values and virtues.

As with the previous section bisexuality is a state of constant re-negotiation, which is seen as more difficult because it does not have an exact opposite. As Jenkins (2000) states we can often measure what we are by what we are not. If for example we know we are not homosexual the logical response is that we are heterosexual as it is positioned as being the opposite of homosexuality. Such an example does not exist with bisexuality and makes the negotiation process more difficult.

Unlike a good deal of research I conclude strongly that looking for a universal definition of bisexuality is a fruitless pursuit. The variety shown throughout the stories of the respondents showed that in reality they did not have a universal definition waiting to be discovered. In a society which is understands things in terms of black or white, there is no space for the grey, and when there is it is misunderstood. The thesis shows that all previous work is of merit. The data chapters explored: the role of sexual history, behaviour and attraction, complex post-modern definitions and simple definitions. What came from this is a realisation that, the identity framework I have constructed shows that stories are going to be individual and bisexuality will always be individualised to a large degreeBisexuality then for my respondents could be a combination of the following dimensions: Engaging in sexual behaviour with more than one sex, historically being romantically involved with more than one sex, practising polyamorous relationships (either with any combination of sexes or with multiple partners of the same or opposite sex), being emotionally/spiritually/physically attracted to more than one sex, being attracted to 'other qualities' and these being the main initiator rather than biological sex (sense of humour for example), having close friends of more than one sex, being a split of masculinity and femininity, being attracted to those who play with gender, engaging in fantasy for more

than one sex, being politically active in bisexual/gender/sexuality, and most importantly defining oneself as bisexual.

All of these could be present or only one of them could be present for someone to possibly call themselves bisexual. Furthermore, it is probable that there are more dimensions, the dimensions shown here are the result of asking bisexuals who are Christian. However, just as there are common dimensions for calling oneself heterosexual or homosexual there are common dimensions for bisexuals. The difference is however, that the dimensions for bisexuals are often multiple, they maybe or may not refer to the sex or gender of the individuals, they may or may not be radical and force us to reconsider what sexuality means.

TURNING TO BISEXUAL CHRISTIAN LIFE

The title of this section is a play on the phrase 'turn to life' created by Heelas and Woodhead (2005) and Woodhead (2001). Here I argue that these ideas are evident with my respondents. In this section I will briefly reiterate the main arguments of the thesis and discuss how they relate to the data.

The stories that the respondents told me about their faith represented a 'turn to life' with an increased sense of personal authority towards their own faith. The stories showed a keen awareness of choice with regard to what Christianity can be and an ability to shape faith to fit lifestyle choice. This applied to how they understood their faith and God, their relationship with the Church and their attendance, how they used the Bible and the role of denomination. All of these were informed by personal experience and show a level

of reflexivity and choice. These issues were explored in the data chapters. Here there are two main arguments: (i) bisexual Christians have personalised both their religious faith and sexuality because of misunderstandings of bisexuality, because of this the challenges they face are more complex that those of other non-heterosexual Christians, (ii) the life-stories of bisexual Christians represent a Turn to Life.

The respondents placed little importance upon communal worship and going to Church, they did not make the link between going to Church and being a good Christian. It would seem that 'believing without belonging' (Davie 1994) is a common trend throughout my sample. The Church, if used at all was a place of community and tradition. Yet even this sense of community was undermined with the decline in Church numbers, Church was often a place to be alone with God without disturbance from outside problems.

The stories told show an increased ability to reflexively organise and negotiate the private and the public. The respondents took on board the societal stories and also the voices from the organised Church, yet this was tempered by personal experience. As Yip (2003) and Hunt (2002) have argued personal biography and experience now works on at least an equal level to other influences when shaping faith. The respondents as Woodhead (2001) suggests filter external influences through the self and attempt to produce a faith which does something in 'this life'. The respondents spoke of a need to use religion as a way of living, or as a kind of moral guideline by which they lived their life. The emphasis then has shifted towards using spirituality as a comfort against biphobia. Informed by their own experiences Christianity was used to help the respondents make sense of their lives rather than telling them what they should or shouldn't do. Christianity, for them was something that fit with their way of life whilst offering suggestions about how to be good members of society.

The turn to bisexual Christian life shows that definitions of Christianity are not rigid and therefore discussions about whether the respondents were 'spiritual' or 'Christian' are moot. It is my assertion that the respondents highlight the similarities of such terminology. What remains clear is that the Christianity discussed by the respondents shows faith as a complex negotiation of the personal (experience, biography) which is reflexively ordered, the social and the institutional (the Church and its traditions). However, it would not be difficult to argue that because bisexuality is so widely misunderstood and some denominations have been openly dismissive about the validity of bisexuality, bisexual Christians have had to use more reference to the personal in creating their religious stories. I feel that Christianity is transforming in line with the Turn to Life thesis. Through the rise of individualisation, Christianity has become a more 'me' centred project. In other words, rather than worshipping a god created by others in today's society it is possible to project your own experiences upon your understanding of God. I feel that bisexual Christians, because of their position as being a rather overlooked group in society have demonstrated such an ethic well.

I would argue that gay and lesbian Christians have had the opportunity to engage with their personal experiences and a society which is more understanding about issues of homosexuality. The same cannot be said about bisexuality as it is the case that society is not becoming more accepting towards bisexuality because society does not know what bisexuality is.

ENGAGING WITH THE CHURCH: CAN CHRISTIANS BE BISEXUAL?

The thesis has been an exploration of the challenges in being both bisexual and Christian. With this in mind one question that can be asked is can Christians be bisexual, or perhaps more accurately what it stopping Christians being bisexual (or bisexuals being Christian). There are three main arguments I put forward: (i) bisexuality has been misunderstood by the Church in general, (ii) bisexual Christians have often moved away from the institutional Church and argue that attendance is not required to call oneself Christian, and (iii) from the perspective of the respondents, the official teaching of the Church is based on incorrect interpretation of the Bible.

As discussed in the literature review (Chapter 2) bisexuality is perceived differently by different Christian denominations. Bisexuality is perceived by the Church as either being some sort of psychological disorder (the Catholic Church), as being against God's wishes as detailed in the Holy Bible (Evangelicalism and conservative denominations) or being promiscuous and a matter of choice whether to be homosexual or heterosexual (Anglicanism). I have shown throughout the data chapters that bisexuality is none of these. Bisexuality is a distinct sexual identity which struggles for recognition because of society's inability to recognise anything that does not have a direct opposite as a reference point. Western society has learnt to tolerate homosexuality because it understands it as not being heterosexuality. However, it takes time and effort to understand fully what bisexuality is. The data suggests that that Church needs to understand bisexuality simply as an honest and valid form of sexual identity which is not inherently promiscuous or untrustworthy. Bisexual relationships are carefully negotiated and constructed and there

is no evidence that there are any more likely to lead to adultery than non-bisexual relationships. In fact because such relationships need to be discussed and negotiated it is likely that there will be less chance of cheating or relationship breakdown.

The literature focussing upon Bible misinterpretation and the misuses of the Bible is growing. Here I can but echo the work of Thumma (1991) and Yip (2005) who have shown how non-heterosexual individuals can fit the Bible with their lifestyles. In terms of Biblical arguments against bisexuality the solution seems to be alignment with the arguments put forward here. The Bible reduces sexuality to sexual acts and therefore a separation between bisexuality and homosexuality is difficult. However, the Church should (and in many ways has) treat the issue of bisexuality separately from homosexuality because the issues faced are different and need separate consideration as I have outlined.

The decision to step away from organised Christianity in many ways has been inevitable for bisexual Christians, owing to the perceived resistance to accepting bisexuality. Yet Christianity refers to more than going to Church or reading the Bible. The 'turn to life' has meant that Christianity has become personalised with respondents requiring a direct route to God without the interference of a priest. The turn to life as understood by Woodhead (2001) represents a shift from focussing religion upon what will happen in this life rather than what will happen in the next, or after-life. Religion is a complex negotiation of what fits with individuals' life experiences and how to make this life better, rather than what to do better now ready for the next life (in heaven). Underneath this is the logical assertion that such an approach leads to a more individualised form of religion which is personally constructed in a reflexive manner. The respondents show that Christianity does not need to be institutional and one does not need to engage with the institutional in order to be Christian. Although a sense of community is often welcomed it is not vital. Furthermore, the respondents felt organised faith had lost its focus, tending to be

concerned with issues that were not important to them. There was a desire for Christianity to return (as they saw it) to values of love, acceptance, generosity and social justice. The constant focus of the Church upon issues of sexuality left the respondents feeling that the Church was not concerned with the same issues as the congregation.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

There are several areas in which further research would be worthwhile, building upon the findings of this project. These recommendations are as follows:

1.   The thesis has been concerned with the negotiation of bisexuality and faith. Therefore it is important to explore how this relates to the broader backdrop of contemporary religiosity and spirituality. How religion is changing needs to be explored in much greater detail in light of this research.

2.   Empirical studies into bisexual Christians are very few in number, as became apparent during the literature review. More in-depth research into different denominations (and non-denominations) and the lives of the respondents would be worthwhile.

3.   There is a need for study of the interaction between clergy and issues of bisexuality. This research has shown a distinction between official Church statements and ground-level responses by clergy themselves. This needs to be explored both in terms of the clergy themselves and the congregation's relationship with the clergy.

4.   There is an emerging body of research using personal diaries as research tools. A research project using this methodology could provide further insight into the complex identity negotiations that take place.

5.   There is a need for empirical research which goes beyond organised religion, exploring the rise of self-spirituality in relation to bisexuality. This would speak to the research on bisexuality and Christianity and help to explore the changing nature of religion and spirituality.

6.   The bisexual population assessed was rather narrow (due to the general nature of the bisexual population itself). A study of the bisexuality and faith in the lives of ethnic minorities would be worthwhile, little research exists exploring ethnicity and bisexuality.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1- PUBLICITY LEAFLET

Follows on next page.

Please note, the research project began at Nottingham Trent University but moved to University of Nottingham in October 2008.

Contact Details

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Reply Slip

I would like to receive more information/I would like to take part:

Name:_____

Address:_____

_____

A Study of the Lives of Bisexual Christians.

Request for Participants.

Hi, my name is Alex Toft a research student from Nottingham Trent University, where I am currently studying for my PhD, which is being funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC). The purpose of this leaflet is to introduce you to my research and to invite you to take part.

In recent years there has been a surge in research into bisexuality, particularly with regards to lifestyle, relationships and politics. However, there has been little research into religion and spirituality in the lives of bisexual men and women.

This ground-breaking research aims to document the stories of Christian bisexual men and women in order to examine 3 important aspects of their lives: spirituality, sexuality and access to/participation in support networks. The research will generate important data to inform the debate on Christianity and bisexuality in particular and sexuality in general. The project will raise the awareness of people towards bisexual Christians, it is an opportunity for you to make sure the bisexual community is heard.

Would you be interested in taking part in this research? This is a chance for you to tell your story, and help to contribute to this important and much needed research.

I would like to emphasize the fact that during the research process and in the dissemination of my research findings, your confidentiality is assured. The research follows strictly the guidelines of the British Sociological Association Ethical Guidelines (see www.britsoc.co.uk/equality/Statement%20Ethical%20Practice). All data collected will be anonymised, so that no participant can be identified at any time.

The research consists of 2 phases. You may volunteer to take part in both or perhaps just phase 1 of the research.

Phase 1- Questionnaire

You will be sent a questionnaire; either by email or post (freepost envelopes will be provided). The questionnaire will collect information regarding your experiences as a bisexual Christian. The questionnaires aim to create a picture of what it means to be bisexual and Christian by collecting information such as relationship history and religious experiences.

Phase 2- One-to-one Interviews

If you have completed the questionnaire and you are willing to take part in a one-to-one interview you may be selected to take part in an interview. There are limited places for this phase of the research. The interview will focus upon the issues raised in the questionnaire and will be a chance for you to tell your story. It is a chance to contribute to debate concerning sexuality and the Church.

My contact details are overleaf. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you want to take part or require more information. Thank you for reading and I look forward to hearing from you.

Alex Toft. 25th May 2007.

APPENDIX 2- ADVERTISEMENT

Hi, my name is Alex Toft a research student from The University of Nottingham, where I am currently studying for my PhD, which is being funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC). The purpose of this notice is to introduce you to my research and to invite you to take part.

In recent years there has been a surge in research into bisexuality, particularly with regards to lifestyle, relationships and politics. However, there has been little research into religion and spirituality in the lives of bisexual men and women.

This ground-breaking research aims to document the stories of Christian bisexual men and women in order to examine 3 important aspects of their lives: spirituality, sexuality and access to/participation in support networks. The research will generate important data to inform the debate on Christianity and bisexuality in particular and sexuality in general. The project will raise the awareness of people towards bisexual Christians, it is an opportunity for you to make sure the bisexual community is heard.

Would you be interested in taking part in this research? This is a chance for you to tell your story, and help to contribute to this important and much needed research.

I would like to emphasize the fact that during the research process and in the dissemination of my research findings, your confidentiality is assured. The research follows strictly the guidelines of the British Sociological Association Ethical Guidelines (see www.britsoc.co.uk/equality/Statement%20Ethical%20Practice). All data collected will be anonymised, so that no participant can be identified at any time.

The research consists of 2 phases. You may volunteer to take part in both or perhaps just phase 1 of the research.

Phase 1- Questionnaire

You will be sent a questionnaire and a consent form; either by email or post (freepost envelopes will be provided). The questionnaire will collect information regarding your experiences as a bisexual Christian. The questionnaires aim to create a picture of what it means to be bisexual and Christian by collecting information such as relationship history and religious experiences.

Phase 2- One-to-one Interviews

If you have completed the questionnaire and you are willing to take part in a one-to-one interview you may be selected to take part in an interview. There are limited places for this phase of the research. The interview will focus upon the issues raised in the questionnaire and will be a chance for you to tell your story. It is a chance to contribute to debate concerning sexuality and the Church.

My contact details are below. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you want to take part or require more information. Thank you for reading and I look forward to hearing from you.

Alex Toft. 5th Sep 2007.

Alex Toft

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University Park
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NG7 2RD
Telephone 07834533207
Email: lqxat3@nottingham.ac.uk

APPENDIX 3- CONSENT FORM

Alex Toft

School of Sociology and Social Policy
University of Nottingham
University Park
Nottingham
NG7 2RD
Telephone 07834533207
Email: lqxat3@nottingham.ac.uk

A Study of the Lives of Bisexual Christians.

Dear respondent,

I would firstly like to thank you for your interest in my research. The research aims to collect the life-stories of bisexual Christians in order to understand how they manage their personal and social. The questions asked will concern matters of your sexuality, spirituality, your place in the bisexual Christian community and responses to official Church policy.

Please specify (by ticking) which stage(s) of the project you would like to take part in. Note: To take part in a one-to-one interview you must complete a questionnaire.

Questionnaire ( ). -The questionnaire aims to collect data regarding you, your sexuality and your spiritual life. This will create a picture of how bisexual Christians live their lives. The questionnaires are anonymous.

One-to-one Interview ( ). - The interview will be tape-recorded and transcribed. However, all data will be anonymised and there will be no way to link you with the data collected. I will be the only person with access to the original recordings/transcripts. The interviews will address particular issues which have affected you the most. They will be a chance for you to tell your story.

<u>Your rights:</u>

- As a respondent you have the right to withdraw at any stage of the research, this includes before, during or after the data collection process.
- You do not need to justify your reasons for withdrawing your data.
- You have the right to refuse to answer questions without any justification.

Please sign and date here to give your consent:

Please provide me with some contact details in order for me to send more information regarding the interviews. If you do not wish to take part in the interview stage please leave this blank:

Name:

Address:

Tel No: Email:

Note: Do not post this in the same envelope as a completed questionnaire. Please use the separate envelope provided. This is a confidentiality measure to protect your identity. If you return this via email I save the files and destroy all emails.

Yours sincerely,

APPENDIX 4- THE QUESTIONNAIRE

The University of Nottingham

A Study of the Lives of Bisexual Christians.

Dear Participant,

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research project. This questionnaire aims to collect a range of information regarding your sexuality and spirituality.

I would like to reassure you that all data collected is strictly confidential, and anonymity will be maintained throughout the research project. Please do not feel that you have to answer all questions. If you do not wish to answer a question please leave it blank. Also, if you feel a question does not apply to you please leave it blank.

This research project takes place at the University of Nottingham and is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council.

The questionnaire is divided into sections and there are notes regarding how to complete the questionnaire throughout.

I hope that you will enjoy completing the questionnaire. Once again I would like to thank you for your time and willingness to contribute to the research.

NOTE: Do not post this in the same envelope as your completed consent form. Please use the separate envelope as provide. This is to protect your identity.

Yours sincerely,

Alex Toft

Post-Graduate PhD Research Student

University of Nottingham. 11/09/2007

Your Details.

I would like to begin by collecting information about your background. The questions will look at general issues about you.

Please note: If you are completing this electronically it is easier to highlight your answers, and to ensure that you 'Insert' text (by pressing the 'Ins' key on your keyboard) when completing open-ended questions.

1. What is your sex? Please be specific (For example: Male, female, female to male transsexual)

    _____
    _____
    _____
    _____
    _____
    _____

2. What is your age? (in years)_____

3. To which Christian denomination do you belong? (For example: Anglican , Methodist etc.)
    _____

    How would you describe your ethnic background?_____

4. What is the highest educational qualification that you possess?
    _____
    _____

5. What is your employment status?

a) Unemployed   (   )
b) Student   (   )
c) Retired   (   )
d) Employed full-time   (   )
e) Employed part-time   (   )
f) Self-employed   (   )
g) Job share/occasional work   (   )
h) On a Government scheme   (   )

Your Relationships

The following questions are concerned with how you manage your living arrangements and your relationship history.

6. In what part of England do you live (please specify the county)?
   _____

7. What is your relationship status (e.g. single, married, living-together etc.)
   _____
   _____

8. How many partners do you currently have?
   _____

9. If you are currently with a partner(s) please specify the length of time in years and months that you have been with your partner. If you have multiple partners please outline the time with each partner:
   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____

10. Do you live with your partner(s)? If you have multiple partners specify which partner(s) you live with

a) Yes ( ). Go to question 11
b) Yes , I live with multiple partners ( ). Go to question 11
c) Yes, I live with one of my multiple partners ( ). Go to question 11
d) No ( ). Go to question 12

11. For how many years have you lived with your partner (s). If you have multiple partners please be specific?
   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____

12. Do you intend to move in with a partner in the future?

a) Yes ( )

b) No ( )

c) Not Sure ( )

13. What is the sex of your current partner?

a) Male ( )
b) Female ( )
c) Transgendered/Transexual ( )
d) I'm currently single ( )
e) I have multiple partners ( ). Please specify the sex of each partner:

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

14. With which sex have you had the most relationships?

a) Male ( )
b) Female ( )
c) Transsexual ( )
d) About the same ( )
e) Uncertain ( )

15. How would you describe your partner's sexuality? If you are currently single please complete this section for your last partner.

a) Heterosexual ( )
b) Homosexual ( )
c) Bisexual ( )
d) Other (please specify)_____

Is the sexuality of your partner important to you? Why?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

16. What religion is your partner? If you are currently single please complete this section for your last partner.

a) Christian ( )
b) They are not religious   ( )
c) Muslim ( )
d) Buddhist ( )
e) Jewish ( )
f) Other (please specify)_____

Is your partner's religion important to you? Why?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

17. Do you have any children? If yes please state how many:

_____

18. Would you ever consider getting married or having a civil partnership? Please give a reason for your answer. If you are already married/have a civil partnership please state why you did this:

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Your Sexuality.

Kindly answer the following questions which are all about your sexuality.

19. Please tick all that apply to you:

a) I am more physically attracted to men than women   ( ). Go to question 21
b) I am more physically attracted to women than men   ( ). Go to question 21
c) I prefer to have sex with women   ( ). Go to question 21
d) I prefer to have sex with men   ( ). Go to question 21
e) I feel more emotionally attached to women   ( ). Go to question 21
f) I feel more emotionally attached to men   ( ). Go to question 21
g) I have more male friends   ( ). Go to question 21
h) I have more female friends   ( ). Go to question 21
i) None of the above apply to me   ( ). Go to question 20.

20. Please explain why none of question 19 apply to you:
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

21. Please try and describe your sexuality as concisely as possible:
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

22. At what age did you realize/decide that you were bisexual?
_____

23. What were your thoughts/feeling as you began to realize your sexuality?
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

24. To whom are you 'out' as a bisexual, please tick as many as apply:

a) My partner   ( )
b) My father   ( )

c) My mother   ( )
d) Other members of family   ( ), please specify:
_____
e) My friends   ( )
f) Work colleagues   ( )
g) My Priest
h) Others   ( ), please specify as many as you feel relevant:

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

25. Kindly circle the most suitable numbers to indicate your thoughts on the following statements:

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Not Certain	Agree	Strongly Agree
a) I am proud to identify as bisexual	1	2	3	4	5
b) I often feel discriminated against by heterosexuals because of my sexuality	1	2	3	4	5
c) I often feel discriminated against by homosexual because of my sexuality	1	2	3	4	5
d) My sexual attraction constantly changes	1	2	3	4	5
e) Bisexuality allows you to fit into both heterosexual and homosexual communities	1	2	3	4	5
f) It would be easier to be heterosexual	1	2	3	4	5
g) It would be easier to be homosexual	1	2	3	4	5

Your Religious Faith and Practices

I would now like to ask a few questions regarding your religion. This section will focus upon your thoughts and experiences with regards to Christianity, the Church and your relationship with the Bible.

26. How often do you attend Church?

a) Daily   (   ). Go to question 28
b) A few times a week   (   ). Go to question 28
c) Weekly   (   ). Go to question 28
d) Fortnightly   (   ). Go to question 28
e) Monthly   (   ). Go to question 28
f) Only on special occasions   (   ). Go to question 28
g) Never   (   ). Go to question 27

27. Please describe your reasons for not attending Church:

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

28. How do you sustain your spirituality? Please tick as many as you feel apply:

a) Regular Church attendance   (   )
b) Bible reading   (   )
c) Through personal spiritual exploration   (   )
d) Attendance at Church groups   (   )
e) Attendance at non-Church related Christian groups   (   )
f) Others, please specify those which you feel are important:

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

29. Bisexuality was created by God:

a) True   (   )
b) False   (   )
c) Unsure   (   )

Please justify your answer:

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

30. Please circle the appropriate numbers to indicate your beliefs and opinions regarding the following statements. Note: If any of these statements do not apply to you please leave them blank (e.g. if you do not attend Church you cannot answer d)

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Not Certain	Agree	Strongly Agree
a) The Bible is often misinterpreted with regards to sexuality	1	2	3	4	5
b) The Bible is negative towards non-heterosexual relationships	1	2	3	4	5
c) Spirituality is about personal exploration	1	2	3	4	5
d) There is a difference between what the Bible teaches and what my priest teaches	1	2	3	4	5
e) The Church is too rigid with regards to how Christians should worship	1	2	3	4	5
f) Church attendance is necessary for all Christians	1	2	3	4	5
g) The Bible is incompatible with modern life	1	2	3	4	5

31. Kindly rate the following practices in order of importance for you as a Christian:

	Unimportant	Not certain	Important
a) Regular prayer	1	2	3
b) Bible study	1	2	3
c) Church functions	1	2	3
d) Church fund-raisers	1	2	3
e) Personal reflection/meditation	1	2	3

Your Support Networks

I would like to know about your involvement within sexual and religious communities.

32. What is the main way for you to interact with other bisexual Christians?

a) The Internet ( )
b) Church ( )
c) Local clubs ( )
d) Bisexual groups ( )
e) Christian groups ( )
f) Others   ( ), please specify as many as you feel appropriate:

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

33. Do you attend support groups?

a) Yes   ( ). Please specify what groups you attend:

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
Go to question 34.

b) No   ( ). Go to question 35.

34. What type of support groups do you attend or take part-in (include internet groups). Tick as many as are appropriate

a) Bisexual groups   ( )
b) Christian groups   ( )
c) Equal rights groups   ( )
d) Other groups   ( ). Please specify as many as you can:

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

35. Please circle the most suitable numbers to indicate your beliefs and opinions on the following:

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Not Certain	Agree	Strongly Agree
a) Support groups offer a safe environment	1	2	3	4	5
b) Support groups allow me to socialize with other bisexual Christians	1	2	3	4	5
c) Support groups enable people to become activists	1	2	3	4	5
d) Support groups help me form intimate relationships	1	2	3	4	5
e) Support groups help me keep up with events within the community	1	2	3	4	5

Are there any other reasons why you think support groups/networks are important:
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

36. Please circle the most suitable numbers to indicate your beliefs and opinions on the following:

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Not Certain	Agree	Strongly Agree
a) There needs to be more support groups exclusively for bisexual Christians	1	2	3	4	5
b) Bisexual Christians need to be more vocal about their sexuality and religion	1	2	3	4	5
c) The media does not take bisexual Christian support groups serious	1	2	3	4	5
d) Support groups need to focus on educating people about bisexuality and Christianity	1	2	3	4	5
e) Bisexuals face a greater challenge than homosexuals in terms of acceptance within Christianity	1	2	3	4	5

Your Life as a Bisexual Christian

I would now like to look at how you live life as a bisexual Christian, what your experiences are and how you have overcome potential difficulties

37. Please circle the most suitable numbers to indicate your beliefs and opinions on the following:

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Not Certain	Agree	Strongly Agree
a) Christianity is intolerant of bisexuals	1	2	3	4	5
b) Christianity persecutes bisexuals	1	2	3	4	5
c) The Church does not understand bisexuality	1	2	3	4	5
d) Bisexuals face greater persecution than homosexuals	1	2	3	4	5
e) The Bible is used as a weapon against equality for bisexuals	1	2	3	4	5
f) Bisexuals can choose to be heterosexual	1	2	3	4	5
g) Bisexuals 'should' choose to be heterosexual	1	2	3	4	5
h) Non-heterosexuals would be welcomed into Christianity if there was same-sex marriage	1	2	3	4	5
i) Bisexual Christians should be monogamous	1	2	3	4	5

38. Do you think it is important for all bisexuals to be 'out' within their religious community? Why?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

39. Do you think that it is important to tell your religious community about your sexuality? Please justify your answer:

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

40. Do you think the Church is negative towards bisexuals? Please comment on your answer:

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

41. Have you faced negative responses to your sexuality from the your local Church?

a) Yes ( ). Go to question 42
b) No ( ). Go to question 43

42. What form did this negativity take?

a) Verbal abuse ( )
b) Exclusion ( )
c) Physical abuse ( )
d) Others ( ), please specify as many variations as you feel necessary:

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

43. I feel that with time the Christian Church will accept bisexuality.

a) True   ( )
b) False   ( )
c) Unsure   ( )

44. Are there any other issue which you feel this questionnaire should have addressed?
(Continue on a new document if you need to).

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Thank you for your time, it is greatly appreciated.

This is the end of the questionnaire.

APPENDIX 5- INTERVIEW GUIDE

Please note- Each guide was individually tailored based on the questionnaire- This guide is just the starting point

<u>Bisexual Identities</u>

- Definitions of (bi)sexuality
- 'Types' of bisexuality
- Dealing with biphobia (prejudice, discrimination)
- Challenges to monosexuality
- Negotiating space within the heterosexual and homosexual communities
- Flexibility of bisexuality- e.g. adopting different sexual identities
- How bisexuality is 'done'
- Influences of religious identity on sexual identity

<u>Religious identities</u>

- The role of 'organized' religion
- Church attendance
- New forms of spirituality (the Bible Buffet)
- Variations within denominations
- Non-monogamous relationships within Christianity
- Pressure on religious identity- leaving the Church/denying ones sexuality
- Influences of sexuality on religious identity

<u>Support Networks</u>

- Attendance of support groups/networks
- Availability of support groups
- The role/purpose of such groups
- Bisexual politics
- Bisexual Activism
- The organization of bisexual relationships
- Internet support groups

<u>Responses to Official Church Policy</u>

- Pressures on sexuality within spirituality
- Differences between the official stance and what local priests teach
- Variations within the Church
- Personal Experiences
- Threat of rejection from each community

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