BISEXUALITY AND MULTIPLE-GENDER-ATTRACTION IN BRITAIN, 1970 – 1990: A QUEER ORAL HISTORY

by

MARTHA ALLEGRA ROBINSON RHODES

A thesis submitted to the University of Birmingham for the degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of History

School of History and Cultures

College of Arts and Law

University of Birmingham

December 2020

Abstract

This thesis is the first history of bisexuality in Britain. It argues that gay liberation and lesbian feminism in the 1970s and 1980s played a significant role in creating and reinforcing a binary of 'gay' and 'straight', through dichotomous political logics that worked to prevent bisexuals and those attracted to multiple genders from developing a coherent identity politics.

The 1970s and 1980s were a very particular historical moment, in which the use of the term 'bisexual' to describe sexual attraction was relatively new, and the binary of gay and straight was just becoming socially dominant. This thesis looks at the broader circumstances of the period to understand why and to what effect bisexuality was called into being at this particular point in time. It is therefore not a 'recovery' history, seeking to make bisexuality visible in the historical record for its own sake, but a case study that informs us about the late-twentieth-century political, social and cultural moment.

Gay liberationists excluded bisexuals and people attracted to multiple genders because they were associated with 'straightness', heterosexual marriage and the family. They were also hyper-sexualised, and thus excluded from lesbian feminism because of a constructed dichotomy between the sexual and the political. This meant that the nascent bisexual communities that developed towards the end of the period were ultimately vague and inaccessible to many. The exclusion of bisexuality and multiple-gender-attraction from radical liberationist groups challenges historical narratives about the 'liberatory moment' of the 1970s and the 'queer' inclusivity of radical politics.

Acknowledgements

This research was made possible by the Arts and Humanities Research Council Midlands4Cities Doctoral Training Partnership, which awarded me the funding to complete this project, as well as generous financial support to carry out interviews and archival research around the country.

Thank you also to my supervisors, Matt Houlbrook, Chris Moores and Mo Moulton. I am extremely fortunate to have benefitted from their range of expertise and insights. Matt supervised the Master's thesis from which this dissertation grew, and helped build my understanding of and engagement with queer history, in all its limitations and possibilities. Chris brought his expertise in oral history methodologies, which were unfamiliar terrain to me before the start of the PhD, as well as grounding me in the social and political context of the 1970s and 1980s. Mo helped me to broaden my intellectual horizons to engage with more diverse, interesting and surprising historiographies than I otherwise would have. All three were endlessly patient, supportive and kind.

PhD research is often described as a lonely process, but this has not been my experience. I consider myself very lucky to have been part of the Centre for Modern British Studies, and the wider History Department at Birmingham, through which I found a wonderful group of postgraduate colleagues who very quickly became friends. Thank you to Hannah Briscoe, Katie Jones, Chelsea Saxby, Rose Debenham, Jacob Fredrickson, Laura Sefton, Emma Barrett, Ruth Lindley and Shahmima Akhtar for the solidarity, advice and encouragement.

I would like to thank Lucy Delap for generously sharing her sources on anti-sexist men, particularly the *Anti-Sexist Men's Newsletter* bisexuality special issue which provided a crucial insight into the origins of London Bisexual Group. The community of fellow LGBT and queer historians in the Oral History Society's LGBTQ Special Interest Group has also been invaluable. Special mention goes to George Severs for being particularly welcoming and generous with advice and support, but the whole group, too numerous to list here, has been vital to the development of my ideas and methodology through friendly debate, shared knowledge and practical tips.

Outside of my academic life, I want to thank my 'Sheffield friends' – Olivia Stoddart, Finlay Stafford, Josh Fogg, Joe Peake, Lizzie Peake and Liam Morgan – some of whom I have known for over a decade. They have provided much-needed distraction and consistent encouragement, and always made the effort to stay close even when we moved apart.

I also want to thank my family – my mum Celia, my dad Mike and my sister Isabel. Without their help, both practical and emotional, and faith in me, this thesis would not exist. In particular, my mum has seen more of my work than perhaps any other reader, and always finds time to give advice and encouragement.

The final nine months of this project were completed during varying degrees of lockdown, which was only made bearable by sharing it with my partner, Sam, and our cat Norma. Since I was unable to get to the archive to take better-quality photos, Sam edited the images on page 2 from fuzzy phone camera snaps to the slightly-more-legible images included in this thesis. I also want to thank him for the endless cups of tea and the even more endless patience, for understanding me so well, and for making me laugh.

Finally, I'd like to thank all the interviewees who entrusted me with their memories. This thesis is dedicated to them, and I hope I have done them justice.

Table of Contents

List of Illustrations

List of Abbreviations

C.H.E.[1]	Committee for Homosexual Equality (before 1971)
	Campaign for Homosexual Equality (after 1971)
GLF	Gay Liberation Front
GRA	Gender Recognition Act
HCA	Hall-Carpenter Archives
HLRS	Homosexual Law Reform Society
LGBTQ[2]	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer
NFHO	National Federation of Homophile Organisations
NIGRA	Northern Ireland Gay Rights Association
NWHLRC	North-Western Homosexual Law Reform Committee
OLGA	Organisation for Lesbian and Gay Alliance
SLRS	Sexual Law Reform Society
SM[3]	Sadomasochism
SMG	Scottish Minorities Group

[1] Written sources vary about the use of the full stops to divide the letters in the acronym 'C.H.E.' (as opposed to 'GLF'). I consistently use them because they inform us about the group's politics – the use of the full stop was insisted upon by one conservative member, to avoid any confusion with Che Guevara. Lucy Robinson, Lucy Robinson, *Gay Men and the Left in Post-War Britain: How the Personal Got Political* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 91.

[2] I use 'LGBT' (without the Q) in reference to historical approaches and narratives – to make the distinction between 'queer' historical approaches and 'LGBT' historical approaches. 'LGBTQ' is used as the more commonly accepted way of referring to organisations, identities etc. I will preserve the terminology used in sources when quoting.

[3] Sources refer to sadomasochism, SM, S/M and BDSM. BDSM is the common label at the present moment, but SM was used most frequently in the 1980s. I will preserve the terminology used in sources when quoting, but for the sake of consistently am using 'SM' throughout my analysis.

Introduction

In 1984, the newly-formed British bisexual newsletter *Bi-Monthly* ran a competition for readers to design a '"Bisexual Pride" symbol', which they hoped would become as 'instantly recognisable' as the pink triangle, the Venus symbol, and the Greek letter λ (lambda), which represented gay liberation in the 1970s and 1980s.[1] This was intended to have the practical function of 'appearing as the logo of this Newsletter, on badges, T-shirts, banners and so on', but also the more abstract goal of enabling bisexual visibility: 'most people can spot the clone image in the street, but how can one perpetrate a bisexual image?'.[2]

Twenty-six images were submitted by readers, ranging from the straightforward – the phrase 'Hi, i'm bi!' to be used on 'graffiti or badges' (Fig. 1) – to the more obscure, including a weeping eye, a framed letter B, and conjoined androgynous figures (Figs. 2 – 4).[3] The most commonly-recurring image was the use of Venn diagrams incorporating the Venus and Mars symbols (Figs. 5 – 7), but the winning logo was ultimately one of the most simple – an appropriation of the yin-yang symbol with combined Venus and Mars symbols superimposed on the centre (Fig. 8).

Viewed collectively, the competition entries demonstrate the efforts of a fledgling bisexual community in the early 1980s to define and represent itself. They also highlight some of the difficulties involved. Many of the entries consisted of several images, the designers apparently finding a single symbol too restrictive. This was often linked to ideas of gender, with designers heavily influenced by binary notions of gender even as they tried to move beyond binary representations. Figure 5 shows two Venn diagrams that were part of the same entry, the first – of two Mars symbols and one Venus – representing a 'bisexual man', and the second – two Venus symbols and one Mars – a 'bisexual woman'. Although this presented a binary view of

[1] Anonymous, "Logo Competition", *Bi-Monthly*, January 1984, 5.
[2] Anonymous, "Logo Competition", 5.
[3] Figs. 1-13, unnamed artists, "Entries into the Logo Competition", *Bi-Monthly*, March 1984, 8.

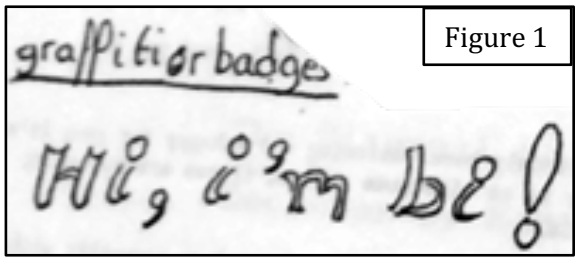

Figure 1

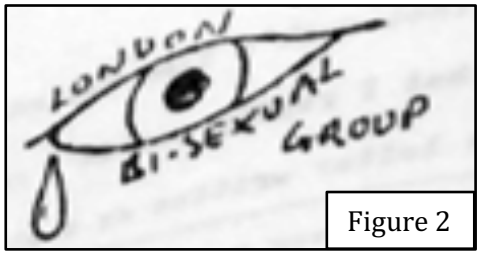

Figure 2

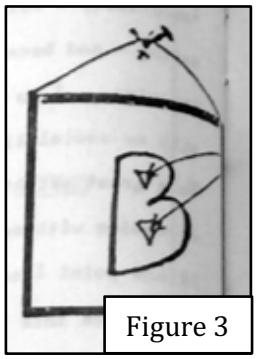
Figure 3

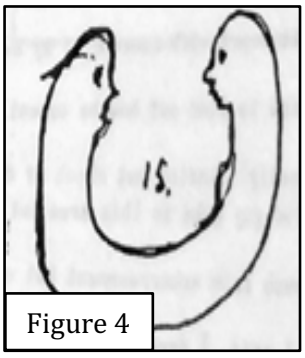

Figure 4

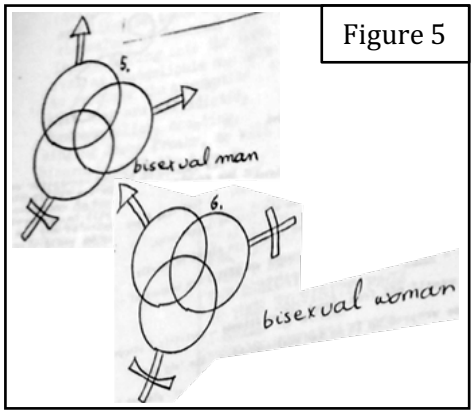

Figure 5


Figure 6

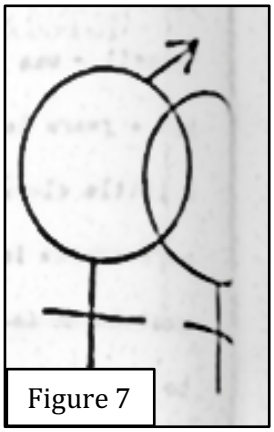
Figure 7

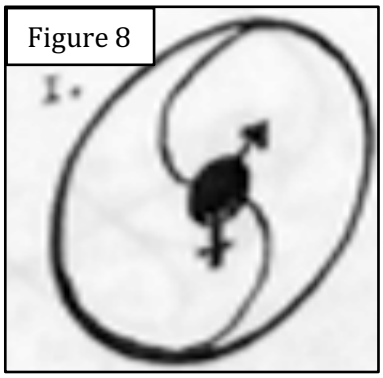

Figure 8

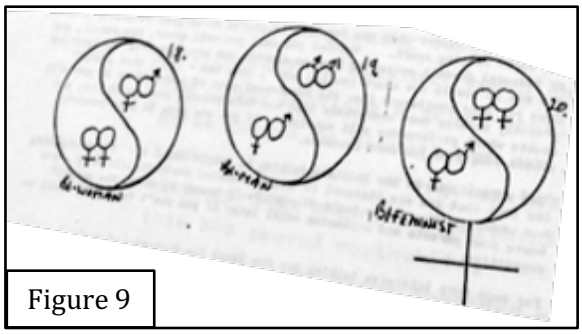

Figure 9

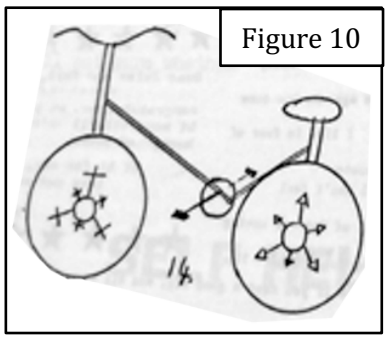

Figure 10

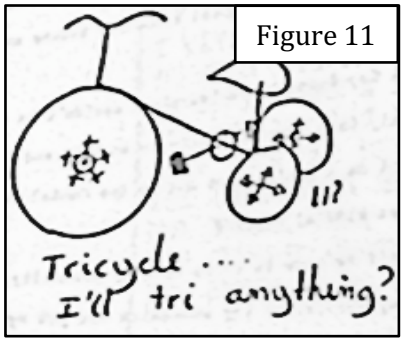

Figure 11


Figure 12

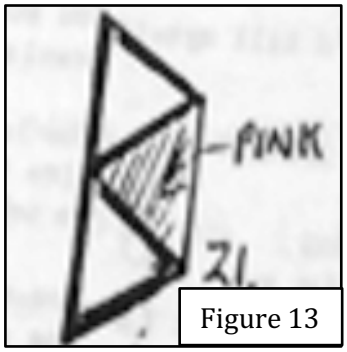

Figure 13

gender, the use of three symbols per gender also invoked an older idea of bisexuality as sexed or gendered mixity. Figure 9 uses three yin-yang symbols to represent 'Bi-woman', 'Bi-man' and 'Bifeminist', which again involve multiple combinations of the Venus and Mars symbols, as well as implying that 'feminist' is a third significant category in addition to the gender binary. One entry was a drawing of a bicycle, with wheels that featured Venus and Mars symbols (Fig. 10), another was a tricycle (Fig. 11), with the caption 'Tricycle… I'll tri anything?', potentially to reclaim portrayals of bisexuality as promiscuous, but also suggesting an effort to move beyond binary representation. As well as significant usage of the Venus and Mars symbols to represent binary genders, the entries also demonstrate the difficulty for bisexuals in distinguishing themselves from gay liberation imagery: two of the entries featured a pink triangle incorporated into the letter B (Figs. 12 and 13), highlighting the continuing use of symbolism associated with the gay liberation movement even as bisexuals tried to define themselves independently. Finally, the competition also highlights the transient nature of these efforts to portray bisexuality. The winning symbol was later subsumed by the bisexual flag of pink, purple and blue, just as the λ and (to a lesser extent) the pink triangle have been subsumed by the rainbow flag in modern depictions of homosexuality.

Bi-Monthly's logo competition was one instance of a recurring effort to define and represent bisexuality, from the 1970s into the present. Often, the difficulties of so doing are used to indicate that the task is ultimately fruitless – Donald E. Hall, in his introduction to the 1996 edited collection *RePresenting Bisexualities*, argued 'This collection takes as one of its foundational premises that BISEXUALITY cannot be definitively REPRESENTED'.[4] Other writers have gone further, arguing that bisexuality cannot be represented because it cannot be defined. In 2013, the bisexual theorist and activist Shiri Eisner introduced her chapter on 'What is Bisexuality?' by stating '*I have no idea what bisexuality means*'.[5] Coupled with the heavy emphasis

[4] Donald E. Hall, "BI-ntroduction II", in *RePresenting Bisexualities: Subjects and Cultures of Fluid Desire*, eds. Donald E. Hall and Maria Pramaggiore (New York, NY: New York University Press, 1996), 9.
[5] Shiri Eisner, *Bi: Notes for a Bisexual Revolution* (Berkeley, CA: Seal Press, 2013), 13. Emphasis in original.

in bisexual politics on inclusion and diversity, this can be used to suggest that bisexuality is a particularly *queer* identity, resisting binaries and simplistic categorisation: 'We challenge the framework within which people think. Many of us refuse to be pigeon-holed neatly, or at all'.[6] However, closer attention to the history of bisexuality demonstrates that this is an overly-simplistic reading. *Bi-Monthly*'s logo competition shows a bisexual community struggling to define itself in this period. Bisexuals were both influenced by gay liberation and lesbian feminism, and seeking to establish an independent identity. They were trying to incorporate an emphasis on diversity and inclusion, but struggling to represent this in a coherent way. Ultimately, these difficulties proved insurmountable – the winning logo soon became obsolete, and would not be recognised by bisexuals today, just as many bisexuals do not recognise the existence of a bisexual community, even in the twenty-first century.

In this thesis I explore the problems of defining bisexuality and its politics coherently, and of navigating its relationship to gay and lesbian politics. The 1970s and 1980s were a very particular historical moment, when the use of the term 'bisexual' to describe sexual attraction was relatively new, and the binary distinction between gay and straight was just becoming socially dominant.[7] I look at the broader circumstances of the 1970s and 1980s in order to understand *why* bisexuality was called into being at this point in time, and with what effects. Ultimately, I argue that the dichotomous political logics underpinning both gay liberation and lesbian feminism in this period worked to prevent those attracted to multiple genders from developing a coherent identity politics. The history of bisexuality has wider implications for histories of sexuality and radical politics, calling into question liberatory narratives of the 1970s and claims about the 'queer' inclusivity of liberationist politics. My concept of 'multiple-gender-attraction', a tool to analyse those who were attracted to multiple genders but did not identify as bisexual, further develops the field of queer critical history that emphasises a move away from

---

[6] The Off Pink Collective, "Introduction", in *Bisexual Horizons: Politics, Histories, Lives,* ed. The Off Pink Collective (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1996), 2.
[7] George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890 – 1940* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1994), 101.

identity labels and static notions of community.

The thesis is based on evidence collated from *Bi-Monthly*, the gay press and the publications of gay liberation organisations, as well as oral history testimonies. I interviewed seventeen individuals between 2018 and 2020, who identified as bisexual or identified otherwise but experienced attraction to multiple genders. I also compare these with two other sets of interviews – the recordings of the Hall-Carpenter Archives Oral History Project (1985 – 1999) stored in the British Library Sound Archive, and the subjects of Charlotte Wolff's *Bisexuality: A Study* (1977).[8] Taken together, these sources show a continual struggle with the definition and categorisation of bisexuality, which continued for some interviewees into the present day.

This is the first history of bisexuality in Britain. However, this in fact understates how little historical work there is on bisexuality as a category of analysis. There is only one other book-length history of bisexuality – *A History of Bisexuality*, by Steven Angelides – which focusses almost entirely on the US context.[9] Angelides also generally analyses sexological and sociological understandings of bisexuality in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, rather than how these connected to bisexuality in the late twentieth century and the present. Although useful for examining the long intellectual history of bisexuality, a topic I will discuss in greater detail below, he generally neglects the crucial moment of the 1970s and 1980s.

With Angelides's notable exception, studies of bisexuality are generally not historical, and histories of sexuality generally do not account for bisexuality. 'Bisexuality studies' also focusses on the US perspective, and narrating and asserting bisexual identity primarily for an audience of other bisexuals.[10] In both the UK and the US, academic work on bisexuality is dominated by

---

[8] The British Library: Hall-Carpenter Archives (HCA) Oral History Project, C456; Charlotte Wolff, *Bisexuality: A Study* (London: Quartet Books, 1977).
[9] Steven Angelides, *A History of Bisexuality* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2001).
[10] Examples of bisexuality studies focusing on Britain include The Off Pink Collective, ed., *Bisexual Horizons: Politics, Histories, Lives* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1996); Loraine Hutchins and Lani Kaahumanu, eds, *Bi Any Other Name: Bisexual People Speak Out* (Los Angeles, CA: Alyson Books, 1991); Kate Harrad, ed., *Purple Prose: Bisexuality in Britain* (Portland, OR: Thorntree Press, 2016).

sociological and psychological analyses that too often isolate bisexuality from its historical context. They also generally ignore those who are attracted to multiple genders but do not identify as bisexual – beyond implicitly or explicitly portraying them as 'really' bisexual and cowardly.[11]

Historians have, in turn, neglected bisexuality in their analyses of the sexual past. There is an extensive history of behaviour that was not contemporaneously identified as bisexual, but might today be understood as such – for example, Matt Houlbrook and George Chauncey discuss the relatively common practice before 1950 of 'normal' working-class men having sex 'with men *and* women', in London and New York.[12] Regina Kunzel shows how this also occurred later in the twentieth century, in the context of US prisons, and argues that the 'modern' understanding of a heterosexual / homosexual binary was 'considerably less hegemonic and less coherent than historians have often assumed'.[13] However, bisexuality itself has been neglected, a historiographical lacuna this thesis seeks to redress. Although the 1970s and 1980s were a key moment in the history of bisexuality, where bisexuality is mentioned in histories of this period it is often as a brief, unexplored add-on in discussions about homosexuality. For example, Lucy Robinson briefly describes Colin MacInnes, author of *Loving Them Both: A Study of Bisexuality and Bisexuals*, as 'not always public about his homosexuality', despite the fact that he stated he was drawing on 'personal experience' in writing *Loving Them Both* and his contemporaries identified

[11] For example, Ann Fox, "Developing a Bisexual Identity", in *Bi Any Other Name: Bisexual People Speak Out,* ed. Loraine Hutchins and Lani Kaahumanu (Los Angeles, CA: Alyson Books, 1991), 31: 'internalised homophobia is a serious impediment to the development of a positive bisexual identity'; Robyn Ochs, "What's in a Name? Why Women Embrace or Resist Bisexual Identity", in *Becoming Visible: Counseling Bisexuals Across the Lifespan*, ed. B. A. Firestein (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2007), 85: 'It can be very frustrating for those of us who identify as bisexual when others reject the label we have worked so long and hard to create a space for'. Ochs argues that the ultimate goal should be to make it safe for everyone to identify, or not identify, as they wish, but also suggests that rejecting the label of bisexuality is primarily due to 'internalised biphobia'.

[12] Matt Houlbrook, *Queer London: Perils and Pleasures in the Sexual Metropolis, 1918 – 1957* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 11; Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 107-108. Quotations from Houlbrook.

[13] Regina Kunzel, *Criminal Intimacy: Prison and the Uneven History of Modern American Sexuality* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 237.

him as attracted to multiple genders.[14] Stephen Brooke acknowledges that bisexuality was 'an issue not easily accommodated within gay rights at the outset', but did not explore the nature or implications of this exclusion any further.[15]

This project aims to redress this historiographical erasure, but it is not a 'recovery' history, seeking to make bisexuality more visible in the historical record for its own sake. Although recovery-focussed histories have important political value, my work is also influenced by queer history that problematises an over-reliance on identity labels. Furthermore, taking bisexuality seriously has implications for historiography beyond simply an additive approach. The case study of bisexuality and multiple-gender-attraction can be used to break apart accepted chronologies, categories and explanatory frameworks in histories of gender and sexuality. Specifically, this thesis argues that the 'liberatory moment' of the 1970s looks very different when bisexuality, rather than homosexuality, is the starting point. The exclusion of bisexuality and attraction to multiple genders by gay liberation and lesbian feminism challenges linear narratives of sexual liberation and progress in this period, in favour of more complex and contingent chronologies. Bisexual invisibility and the lack of a coherent community to provide resolution to linear 'coming out' narratives mean that conventional understandings of 'coming out' are also altered by attention to bisexuality and multiple-gender-attraction. Exploring the history of bisexuality and multiple-gender-attraction therefore has the potential to transform understandings of periodisation, chronology and identity narratives.

Another reason that this thesis is not simply a recovery of bisexual identity, seeking to empower people attracted to multiple genders through awareness of their own history, is because I take a more critical approach to bisexual politics than most works of bisexuality studies.

---

[14] Robinson, *Gay Men and the Left*, 48; Colin MacInnes, *Loving Them Both: A Study of Bisexuality and Bisexuals* (London: Martin Brian & O'Keeffe Limited, 1973), 8. MacInnes was identified as being attracted to multiple genders in a review by Roger Baker, "Stud Against the Wall", *Gay News,* August 1973, 13, which states that MacInnes 'despises homosexuals and despises women but will cheerfully stick his cock up the arse of either'.

[15] Stephen Brooke, *Sexual Politics: Sexuality, Family Planning and the British Left from the 1880s to the Present Day* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 229.

Although bisexual organisations in the 1980s sought to construct a specifically bisexual politics based on inclusivity and sexual liberation, they paradoxically sought to define themselves against lesbian and gay politics, and thus excluded both political ideas and individuals. Celebrations of bisexuality and attraction to multiple genders as inherently more radical by virtue of their supposed diversity and inclusion also allowed bisexuals to leave their own prejudices and exclusions unexamined. My thesis will examine these exclusions, especially in relation to race and gender, and move beyond exceptionalising approaches to analyse how connections between attraction, relationships and identity changed over time.

In taking this more critical approach I build on the work of, particularly, Clare Hemmings, whose cultural geography *Bisexual Spaces* critically interrogates the 'repeated rhetorical invocations' of bisexuality's supposed queerness and diversity, and Merl Storr, who explores 'not just [bisexuality]'s potential for opening up new ways of understanding gender and sexuality, but also its potential for obscuring or even foreclosing new understandings – its limitations as well as its possibilities'.[16] Storr analyses the racialised and imperialist history of the development of bisexuality as a sexological concept concerning sexed and gendered mixity in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, to demonstrate the limitations of bisexuals' claim to multiculturalism and racial diversity.[17] I will discuss this in greater detail below, and it provides a useful pre-history of the myopic approach to race seen in bisexual communities in the 1970s and 1980s. Hemmings' work has been particularly influential in the formation of my approach, and her focus on specific case studies in the US – especially the tension between lesbians and bisexuals in Northampton, Massachusetts, and the effort to develop a bisexual politics in the 1990 US National Bisexual Conference – have many similarities with my own analysis of these dynamics in Britain. That said, there are key differences between the US and British contexts that

[16] Clare Hemmings, *Bisexual Spaces: A Geography of Sexuality and Gender* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2002), 5; Merl Storr, ed., *Bisexuality: A Critical Reader* (London: Routledge, 1999), 1.
[17] Merl Storr, "The Sexual Reproduction of 'Race': Bisexuality, History and Racialisation", in *The Bisexual Imaginary: Representation, Identity and Desire*, ed. Bi Academic Intervention (London: Cassell, 1997), 80.

I will explore throughout the thesis, and Hemmings also generally focusses on these debates in the 1990s, rather than the historical trajectories that influenced and presaged them. This thesis therefore adapts the 'critical bisexuality studies' approach of Storr and Hemmings for the British context, and for the historical moment of the 1970s and 1980s when bisexuality as an identity category was first brought into being.

Methodology and Queer History

'Multiple-gender-attraction' is an umbrella term encompassing the potential to be attracted (usually sexually and romantically, but sometimes otherwise) to more than one gender. Those who identified as bisexual experienced multiple-gender-attraction, but many who did *not* identify as bisexual were attracted to multiple genders as well. In addition to queering and complicating notions about a stable bisexuality in the past, multiple-gender-attraction is a useful concept because many people attracted to multiple genders identified as something other than bisexual – in large part due to the stigmatisation and lack of clarity about bisexual identity that this thesis explores. These people's experiences of attraction and identity are relevant to my broader questions about inclusion, exclusion, politics and storytelling; they are therefore also relevant for analyses of bisexuality in the past. Many people who wrote in to *Gay News* magazine, for example, described themselves as 'not 100% gay', 'not totally gay, I suppose' or 'gay (well actually, bisexual with a strong homosexual bias)'.[18] Other men described themselves as gay because they had sex with men, but were married to women and described a close or romantic bond with their wives.[19] The approach of political lesbians who acknowledged attraction to men while rejecting bisexual identity also informs us about the tensions between feminism, lesbianism and bisexuality in this period. A queer history of bisexuality and multiple-gender-attraction is alive to these complexities, and to the 'elasticity, mobility and plasticity' of attraction and identity

[18] Alison Hennegan, "Ray and Penny", *Gay News*, January 1978, 20; Anonymous, "School – It's Like This, says gay pupil Danny", *Gay News*, March 1979, 2; Anonymous, "I'm Tired of Being Gay", *Gay News*, August 1972, 3.
[19] Keith Howes, "A Matter of Conscience", *Gay News*, March 1977, 21.

categories.[20]

Multiple-gender-attraction, then, is not an identity, but a description of potential attraction. Other writers have used the terms 'bisexual umbrella', 'behaviourally bisexual', 'plurisexual', 'polysexual' and even the Freudian term 'polymorphous perversity' in similar efforts to analyse those who are attracted to more than one gender but do not identify as bisexual.[21] The first two options, for my purposes, still cleave too closely to the identity label of bisexual. Although they intend to problematise the label of 'bisexuality', they still struggle to describe experiences independent of this language. 'Plurisexual' and 'polysexual', while more linguistically straightforward than 'multiple-gender-attraction', are also too similar to existing identity labels, and risk simply including other, albeit broader, terms into a 'paradigm of gay and lesbian [and bisexual and trans] identities', rather than actively moving away from this paradigm.[22] These terms could also be confused with non-monogamy or polyamory – although bisexuality and attraction to multiple genders were often linked to non-monogamy in the 1970s and 1980s, they were not interchangeable, as I will discuss in Chapter Four, and many of those who were attracted to multiple genders rejected these links as stigmatising and stereotypical. Finally, although Sigmund Freud did not intend 'perversity' to carry the same stigma it does today, current understandings of the word suggest that interviewees would not respond well to the use of 'polymorphous perversity'. 'Polymorphous perversity' also places too much emphasis on psychological and sexological discourses which, as I will argue below, meant that bisexuality was

---

[20] Sharon Marcus, *Between Women: Friendship, Desire and Marriage in Victorian England* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007), 13.
[21] Corey E. Flanders, "Introduction to the Special Issue: Under the Bisexual Umbrella: Diversity of Identity and Experience", *Journal of Bisexuality* 17, no. 1 (2017): 1; Joseph P. Stokes, Robin L. Miller and Rhonda Mundhenk, "Toward an understanding of behaviourally bisexual men: The influence of context and culture", *The Canadian Journal of Human Sexuality* 7, no. 2 (1998): 101-113; M. Paz Galupo, "Plurisexual Identity Labels and the Marking of Bisexual Desire", in *Bisexuality: Theories, Research, and Recommendations for the Invisible Sexuality*, eds. D. Joye Swan and Shani Habibi (Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2018), 61-76; Amney J. Harper and Renae Swanson, "Nonsequential Task Model of Bi/Pan/Polysexual Identity Development", *Journal of Bisexuality* 19, no. 3 (2019): 337-360; Lisa Power, "Forbidden Fruit", in *Anti-Gay*, ed. Mark Simpson (London: Freedom Editions, 1996), 56.
[22] Nan Alamilla Boyd, "Who is the subject? Queer Theory Meets Oral History", *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 17, no. 2 (May 2008): 186.

considered a stage of development, rather than a coherent identity, as late as the 1970s. Although I am seeking to move away from an over-reliance on bisexuality as an identity category, replicating the language of scientific discourses that prevented this category existing for many decades seems an unhelpful way to do this.

I use 'multiple-gender' rather than 'bi-gender' or 'dual-gender' to move beyond binary understandings of gender. The focus on attraction, rather than behaviour or relationships, was influenced by work among current bisexual activists which stresses that an individual's understanding of their own feelings should be more important than their behaviour or sexual object-choice in relation to their sexual identity.[23] My recruitment advertisement therefore described the project as 'Multiple-gender-attraction and bisexuality in 1970s and 1980s Britain: an oral history project'. Interviewees were sought who fulfilled 'one or more of the following criteria', laid out in bullet-point form:

- Identify as **bisexual** or **pansexual**
- Identified as bisexual or pansexual in the past
- Have had **relationships with** people of multiple genders
- Have been **attracted to** people of multiple genders

The use of 'multiple-gender-attraction' develops the work of queer theory because it allows analysis of attraction and behaviour without itself being an identity label. As well as recognising that bisexuality in the 1970s and 1980s was an unstable and contested category, 'multiple-gender-attraction' enables practical ways of working with this recognition to analyse historical subjects, without having to sacrifice the principles of queer theory by linking people in the past to identities that they rejected.

The term 'attraction' poses some difficulties connected with identifying emotions – in this case attraction – in the past. For example, would the 'very deep and lasting affectionate', but not sexual, relationship that the gay vicar Peter Elers described having with his wife constitute 'attraction'?[24] The Hall-Carpenter Archives Oral History Project interviewed 230 individuals in

[23] Ochs, "What's in a Name?", 84.
[24] Howes, "A Matter of Conscience", 21.

total between 1985 and 1999, of which only one identified as bisexual, although many of them described relationships with more than one gender.[25] Several lesbian interviewees reflected positively on their past relationships with men, describing feelings of fondness and affection.[26] However, they very rarely used the word 'attraction', making it more difficult to determine whether these emotions are evidence of 'multiple-gender-attraction'.

My approach in these cases has been to use the labels that historical subjects use for themselves (gay, lesbian, bisexual, queer, and others) wherever possible, and to keep the concept of 'multiple-gender-attraction' as broad as possible by including people who demonstrated some evidence of love, affection or sexual attraction to more than one gender – to paraphrase bisexual activist Robyn Ochs, not necessarily at the same time, in the same way, or to the same degree.[27] Describing something as 'multiple-gender-attraction' should not therefore be read as a statement about how a historical subject might identify today, or whether their emotions met an arbitrary standard of 'authentic' attraction, if such a standard were even possible to determine. Nor should the broad application of 'multiple-gender-attraction' be read as an endorsement of the idea that everyone could potentially be described as attracted to multiple genders, the limitations of which I will discuss below. Examples of multiple-gender-attraction have been included where they develop, support or complicate the analysis relating to bisexuality.

In relation to using 'multiple-gender-attraction' in an oral history context, some of the issues regarding the scope of the term are less fraught because interviewees decided whether to include themselves in the project, and usually stated how they identified upfront. That said, some interviewees treated 'multiple-gender-attraction' as essentially synonymous with bisexuality, while others found it confusing. The stigma that made some individuals unwilling to identify

---

[25] Dave Godin, b. 1936, interviewed by Margot Farnham (MF), 10 June 1990, The British Library: HCA Oral History Project, C456/88.
[26] Gilli Salvat, b. 1942, interviewed by Allegra Damji (AD), 29 June 1986, The British Library: HCA Oral History Project, C456/40; Liz Kelly, b. 1951, interviewed by MF, 16 March 1991, The British Library: HCA Oral History Project, C456/105; Diane Langford, b. 1941, interviewed by MF, 10 May 1991, The British Library: HCA Oral History Project, C456/107.
[27] Ochs, "What's in a Name?", 84.

themselves as 'bisexual' also meant that others were understandably keen to defend bisexuality against perceived undermining or delegitimisation. While I wanted to include people who did *not* identify as bisexual in the project, I also did not want to alienate those who *did*, or cast aspersions on their identity.

At the end of the interview with Curtis (b. 1958), for example, I mentioned to him that I was particularly keen to recruit people who did not identify as bisexual, since they might be more difficult to find. He seemed confused, and in his response questioned the idea that just because men 'had sex with other men doesn't necessarily mean they were bisexual':

> they must've got *some* sexual… satisfaction out of doing that […] why run the risk – also huge risk, of course, of criminalisation – being caught, or being beaten up, if you're not – Surely they had some sexual orientation that was bisexual? I can't see that they're not bisexual or gay. Unless they're doing it for prostitution reasons.[28]

For Curtis, multiple-gender-attraction was equivalent to 'some sexual orientation that was bisexual', and my effort to separate them did not make any sense. Although queer oral historians may receive similar responses from interviewees who identify as gay or lesbian, and do not support the move away from identity labels, the comparatively recent and less-established nature of 'bisexual' as an identity label means that bisexuals are more likely to be sensitive to perceived attempts to delegitimise it.

I will now discuss the relationship between queer history and oral history in more detail, as well as the practical ways I incorporated queer oral history into my methodology. My initial conceptualisation of this thesis focussed more heavily on 'recovery' and 'empowerment' models of oral history, which seek to 'recover' the voices of traditionally-disenfranchised groups, in order to empower them.[29] I hoped that oral history methodology would enable me to understand my interviewees 'on their own terms', in contrast to previously-studied written sources which tended to discuss multiple-gender-attraction in a framework of binaries dominated by the concerns of others. Both recovery-focussed and empowerment-focussed approaches can be seen in LGBT oral

---

[28] Interview with Curtis (pseudonym), b. 1958, 24 July 2018.
[29] Lynn Abrams, *Oral History Theory* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010), 154-155.

histories. For example, the Hall-Carpenter Archives Oral History Project produced two books in 1989, one containing 'Gay Men's Life Stories' and the other 'Lesbian Life Stories'.[30] In these, they explained the rationale for the project: to recover 'what is hidden, neglected or dismissed by the traditional focus of history', and thus become 'active participants of our own history and […] have more control over its interpretation'.[31] As this statement indicates, 'recovering' voices which had been 'hidden' or 'dismissed' was assumed to lead to the empowerment of the people whose voices were recovered, usually by redressing power imbalances in historical scholarship. Although these historiographical power imbalances have led to the exclusion of many groups, including women, working-class people and people of colour, some LGBT historians have suggested that recovery- and empowerment-based oral history is *particularly* relevant to marginalised sexualities: such as the San Francisco Gay History Project, which argued in 1979 that 'oral histories are particularly vital to a reconstruction of gay history since written records of our past rarely exist or have been censored or destroyed'.[32]

Some of these earlier iterations of recovery and empowerment-based oral history have been criticised by more recent works. Criticisms of an empowerment-focussed oral history include the argument that these approaches are patronising to their subjects and ignore the power dynamics in the interview scenario. In 1982, in relation to working-class interviewees, the Popular Memory Group of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) pointed out that 'the historian may assert that he [*sic*] has "sat at the feet of working-class witnesses" […] it is, however, *he* that produces the final account, *he* that provides the dominant interpretation, *he* that judges what is true and not true'.[33]

---

[30] Hall-Carpenter Archives Gay Men's Oral History Project, *Walking After Midnight: Gay Men's Life Stories* (London: Routledge, 1989); Hall-Carpenter Archives Lesbian Oral History Project, *Inventing Ourselves: Lesbian Life Stories* (London: Routledge, 1989).
[31] HCA Gay Men, *Walking After Midnight*, 1.
[32] San Francisco Gay History Project, quoted in Kevin P. Murphy, Jennifer L. Pierce and Jason Ruiz, "What Makes Queer Oral History Different", *Oral History Review* 43, no. 1 (2016): 4.
[33] Popular Memory Group, *What do we mean by Popular Memory?* (Birmingham: Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, 1982), 17.

It could be argued that this criticism is less applicable to LGBT oral histories, as often (although not always) the historian shares a marginalised sexual identity with the interviewee, as I will discuss further below. However, feminist oral historians have also written about the importance of acknowledging power differentials between interviewer and interviewee, even when they share the oppressed identity of 'woman'. In 1991, Sherna Berger Gluck and Daphne Patai reflected back on earlier feminist work which had emphasised the empowering nature of oral history interviews between women, saying: 'not all of us had yet leaned to be sceptical of the claims for a single feminist methodology. Our assumptions had the effect of foregrounding gender while obscuring the possible centrality of other factors – race and class in particular'.[34] A shared identity between interviewer and interviewee does not negate other power dynamics in the interview scenario. Indeed, it may make the potential risks of exploitation more great, as Judith Stacey argues: 'the appearance of greater respect for and equality with research subjects […] might actually mask a deeper, more dangerous form of exploitation', with heightened personal involvement in the research process increasing the chances of interviewees feeling betrayed or manipulated by the researcher.[35] Although Stacey is referring to ethnography, which generally involves more sustained periods of interaction than oral history interviews, it is possible to see how the same problems of exploitation and power differentials can be manifested in the context of queer oral history. To argue that oral history in itself empowers disenfranchised groups overlooks the more tangible benefits to the researcher in terms of career advancement and prestige.

Claiming to 'recover' testimonies of 'silenced' communities also implies that these testimonies were pre-existing and waiting to be discovered, and that the communities have existed in a similarly static form. This is particularly problematic for this thesis, given that the

---

[34] Sherna Berger Gluck and Daphne Patai, quoted in Nan Alamilla Boyd and Horacio N. Roque Ramírez, eds, *Bodies of Evidence: The Practice of Queer Oral History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 6-7.
[35] Judith Stacey, "Can There Be A Feminist Ethnography?", *Women's Studies International Forum* 11, no. 1 (1988): 22.

uneven and uncertain development of a bisexual community or communities is one of the key areas of analysis. Queer history has sought to challenge these foundational assumptions in LGBT history, refusing to 'trac[e] back modern sexual identities', and dismissing 'any notion of an unchanging and recognisable homosexual [or bisexual or trans] personhood across history'.[36] This approach is influenced by social constructionism, but also goes further, emphasising the fluidity of sexual attraction and behaviour and the 'fictitious' nature of a binary between heterosexual and homosexual, 'acknowledg[ing] at the outset the unknowability and indeterminacy of the sexual past'.[37] More recent interventions have also sought to move beyond a binary of 'normative' and 'queer', highlighting that this can often be analogous to the hetero/homosexual binary that queer theory initially set out to destabilise. This can involve 'thinking queer' about subjects that do not easily fit into LGBT identity categories, and potentially have little to do with ideas about sex or sexuality.[38] 'Queer' is theorised as a set of practices – of setting aside categorisation and binaries, and historicising social and cultural formations – rather than an identity: moving 'from something we consider our subjects to be, to something we do'.[39] Queer critical history therefore helps move away from the problems with recovery- and empowerment-focussed approaches that present communities as existing in a coherent and recognisable way throughout time, for researchers to 'recover' and thus empower. I describe this project as a queer oral history not because my interviewees could be classified as 'queer', but because I seek to use oral history to historicise the development of bisexuality, to examine how individuals negotiated circulating discourses of bisexuality and attraction to multiple genders, and to explore the ways in which bisexuality could be considered both 'normative' *and* 'queer'.

---

[36] Laura Doan, *Disturbing Practices: History, Memory and Women's Experience of Modern War* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 61; Brian Lewis, "Introduction: British Queer History", in *British Queer History: New Approaches and Perspectives*, ed. Brian Lewis (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), 2.
[37] Lewis, "British Queer History", 2; Doan, *Disturbing Practices*, 61.
[38] Matt Houlbrook, "Thinking Queer: The Social and the Sexual in Interwar Britain", in *British Queer History: New Approaches and Perspectives*, ed. Brian Lewis (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), 135.
[39] Houlbrook, "Thinking Queer", 138, 134.

The relationship between queer critical history and oral history is a fraught one. On the one hand, oral history methodologies provide an opportunity to ground the 'high theory' ideas of queer history, and make these ideas more accessible.[40] On the other hand, Nan Alamilla Boyd writes that the history of sexuality is 'structured through the voices of intelligible speakers', and the use of oral history can exacerbate this.[41] She questions how the historian can 'move beyond the limits of identity politics' when reliant on those who are able to form coherent narratives.[42] I sought to develop a queer oral history methodology of bisexuality and multiple-gender-attraction that took Boyd's concerns into account, paying particular attention to narratives that were incoherent, disjointed or partial.

Kevin P. Murphy, Jennifer L. Pierce and Jason Ruiz argue that queer oral history's attention to 'partiality' is a key factor in its 'queerness'.[43] One meaning of partiality is the state of being partial or unfinished: interviews can always provide more detail or new perspectives from different contexts. Oral history, therefore, is 'always a work in progress […] never an authoritative and finished narrative about the past'.[44] The 'unfinishedness' of oral history parallels José Esteban Muñoz's statement on queerness: 'Queerness is not here yet […] we are not yet queer', as well as Laura Doan's statement about queer critical history being a site where debates 'remain (satisfyingly) unresolved and highly contested'.[45] Some works in critical bisexuality studies also refer to the importance of ideas of incompleteness. Hemmings writes that 'the nature of bisexual social existence is always partial, most often experienced within communities that do not recognise bisexuality as discrete (or viable)', and Eisner argues that the association between bisexuality 'and inauthenticity, partiality […] hybridity' seems 'unpalatable' but has a 'subversive

[40] Murphy et al, "Queer Oral History", 2.
[41] Boyd, "Who is the subject?", 189.
[42] Boyd, "Who is the subject?", 186.
[43] Murphy et al, "Queer Oral History", 7-8.
[44] Murphy et al, "Queer Oral History", 8.
[45] José Esteban Muñoz, quoted in Murphy et al, "Queer Oral History", 8; Doan, *Disturbing Practices*, 43.

power'.[46]

Another meaning of partiality that Murphy *et al* discuss is in the sense of 'affective relations' between interviewer and interviewee.[47] Nan Alamilla Boyd and Horacio N. Roque Ramírez also discuss affective relations in *Bodies of Evidence: The Practice of Queer Oral History*, arguing that the 'interpersonal dynamics at play during oral history interviews' are crucial in disturbing ideas about community formation and identity.[48] Reflexivity and self-awareness about my position as an interviewer is therefore one important way of applying theories of queer critical history to my oral history practice.

Of course, reflexivity is by no means exclusive to queer oral history methods. Michael Roper describes a 'reflexive turn' in oral history in recent decades, primarily influenced by feminist history, which Boyd and Ramírez also acknowledge.[49] This helps to mitigate some of the problems of empowerment-focussed oral histories discussed above, by demystifying the power relations in interview scenarios and making historians' own investments clear. I found the explicit recognition of their subjectivity by feminist oral historians such as Penny Summerfield and Kate Fisher particularly helpful for understanding the interview dynamics and the subsequent interpretation of the interviews, even though they were not working on queer or LGBT oral histories.[50]

Fisher argues that the different genders and marital status of the three interviewers involved in her project had both advantages and disadvantages for their interviewing, with her youth and unmarried status sometimes justifying probing questions on the grounds of curiosity

---

[46] Clare Hemmings, "A Feminist Methodology of the Personal: Bisexual Experience and Feminist Post-Structuralist Epistemology", in Channa Subhandra (ed.), *Feminist Methodology* (New Delhi: Cosmo, 2006), 295; Eisner, *Bi*, 127-128.
[47] Murphy et al, "Queer Oral History", 7-8.
[48] Boyd and Ramírez, *Bodies of Evidence*, 9, 15.
[49] Michael Roper, "Analysing the Analysed: Transference and Counter-Transference in the Oral History Encounter", *Oral History*, 31, 2 (2003): 21; Boyd and Ramírez, *Bodies of Evidence*, 2.
[50] Penny Summerfield, *Reconstructing Women's Wartime Lives: Discourse and Subjectivity in Oral Histories of the Second World War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998); Kate Fisher, *Birth Control, sex and marriage in Britain, 1918-60* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

or naivety, whereas Simon Szreter's position as an older man with children could facilitate empathising over shared experience.[51] Summerfield analyses her own intellectual background as well as the race, age and sexuality of herself and the two other interviewers on her project, and explains how they tried to present themselves as 'open, friendly, relaxed, non-hierarchical and nice-to-talk-to'.[52] She also explicitly notes 'markers of other identities', saying: 'I was eight months pregnant when we started interviewing in 1991, Hilary had been an office worker and teacher of secretarial skills before becoming a university student, Nicole had strong non-academic interests in film, television and journalism'.[53] These markers are not just acknowledged, but integrated throughout her analysis, such as in the final chapter where she points out that her pregnancy may have been a factor when interviewing a woman who was not married and had no children.[54]

Fisher's focus on the potentially difficult issues of sex and contraception meant that her careful approach to recruitment influenced my own. She primarily recruited through community groups, allowing potential interviewees to 'examine the researchers, ask questions, and decide at their leisure whether or not to be interviewed', to encourage those who might otherwise be reticent.[55] I delivered talks and workshops about my research at bisexual community organisations and events, encouraging attendees to begin thinking about bisexuality in the past before asking if they were interested in being interviewed. This approach was particularly successful with the Opening Doors London Bi The Way group, as Opening Doors London is a charity focussing specifically on older LGBTQ people and thus attendees all had memories of the 1970s and 1980s. Louise (b. 1966), Ossian (b. 1954) and Chryssy (b. 1962) were all recruited through Bi The Way.[56] Another workshop at the 2018 BiCon (UK National Bisexual Conference) used historical sources about bisexuality as prompts for a group discussion, which was very well-

[51] Fisher, *Birth Control,* 19.
[52] Summerfield, *Women's Wartime Lives,* 21.
[53] Summerfield, *Women's Wartime Lives,* 21.
[54] Summerfield, *Women's Wartime Lives,* 181.
[55] Fisher, *Birth Control,* 14.
[56] Interview with Louise, b. 1966, 27 July 2018; Interview with Ossian (pseudonym), b. 1954, 13 August 2018; Interview with Chryssy, b. 1962, 12 September 2018.

attended although by predominantly younger people. This was still effective as an indirect form of recruitment, however. Although only two attendees, Ian (b. 1962) and Nigel (b. 1963), went on to be interviewed, other attendees shared information more widely about the workshop and the project.[57] Alison (b. 1967) was recruited this way, as she heard about the workshop afterwards via word of mouth, and Neil (b. 1958) was similarly recruited through word-of-mouth after a brief talk at London Bi Fest.[58] Carmen (b. 1949) approached me after I gave a presentation at an academic conference, which was not specifically seeking to recruit interviewees but in which I spoke about my research.[59] The attendees at bisexual community events also highlighted how most bisexual groups serve an overwhelmingly white and (with the exception of Bi The Way, which was specifically targeted at older people) relatively young demographic – itself significant for my analysis of bisexual communities' inclusions and exclusions.

This awareness of bisexual communities' exclusions meant I also sought out non-community-oriented ways of recruiting interviewees, to find people who were not involved in bisexual organisations. Aidan (b. 1971), Curtis (b. 1958), and Vera (b. 1960) all contacted me after seeing my recruitment advertisement shared on Twitter.[60] I had not anticipated much recruitment through social media, but use of the #BisexualVisibilityDay hashtag on 23rd September proved helpful, along with the fact that it was shared by some accounts with large followings that had themselves formed an online bisexual community. The importance of the Internet for enabling new forms of community was discussed by some interviewees, as I will explore in Chapter Five.

All of the interviewees recruited by the above means identified as bisexual at the time of our interview, except Carmen and Chryssy who identified as pansexual. Even when they did not

[57] Interview with Ian, b. 1962, 7 May 2019; Interview with Nigel, b. 1963, 12 January 2019.
[58] Interview with Alison (pseudonym), b. 1967, 5 October 2018; Interview with Neil (pseudonym), b. 1958, 26 September 2018.
[59] Interview with Carmen (pseudonym), b. 1949, 31 May 2019.
[60] Interview with Aidan, b. 1971, 22 June 2018; Interview with Curtis (pseudonym), b. 1958, 24 July 2018; Interview with Vera (pseudonym), b. 1960, 26 October 2018 and 8 November 2018.

engage with bisexual communities, they generally still felt connected to bisexual identity. However, posting the recruitment advertisement in the letters page of *Diva* magazine, which is aimed at lesbians and bisexual women, led me to find Judith (b. 1954), who also recommended me to Elsa (b. 1951).[61] Both asked beforehand whether they would 'count', as lesbians who had previously been in relationships with men, but once they had been reassured of this fact they were happy to be interviewed. Not identifying as bisexual did not prevent them from agreeing to take part. The use of 'multiple-gender-attraction', combined with targeting media aimed at wider audiences, was therefore successful in terms of recruiting interviewees who were attracted to multiple genders and did not consider themselves bisexual.

The 'snowball sampling' method, of finding interviewees through connection to other interviewees, by which I recruited Elsa also extended my geographical reach beyond England: Ian suggested I speak to Kate (b. 1960), who was based in Edinburgh, who then connected me to Dave (b. 1960).[62] Two other interviewees – Gwen (b. 1951) and Lisa (b. 1954) – agreed to be interviewed after I contacted them directly, having found out about their work in the gay liberation movement through written sources.[63] In total, eleven of the seventeen interviewees identified primarily as bisexual at the time of our interview – although many additionally identified as 'queer', and one as 'heteroflexible'. Two identified primarily as pansexual, three as lesbian, and one as primarily gay or 'not straight'. Many had identified differently in the 1970s and 1980s, primarily as gay men or lesbians, and I will explore how interviewees changed their identities over time in greater detail throughout this thesis.

Although I achieved the aim of interviewing people with a range of attitudes towards bisexual identity and community, in many other ways the interview sample could not be described as 'representative'. Unlike both Fisher and Summerfield, I was the only interviewer on

[61] Interview with Judith (pseudonym), b. 1954, 11 October 2018; Interview with Elsa (pseudonym), b. 1951, 29 January 2019.
[62] Interview with Kate, b. 1960, 31 August 2019; Interview with Dave, b. 1960, 11 January 2020.
[63] Interview with Gwen (pseudonym), b. 1951, 9 October 2018; Interview with Lisa, b. 1954, 4 April 2019.

this project. Doubtless aspects of my own identity and presentation affected all stages of the interview process. My race (white) likely affected the interviewees I was able to recruit – only white people volunteered to be interviewed, although I did contact organisations for bisexual and LGBTQ people of colour as part of the organisation-focussed stage of recruitment. Given the continuing marginalisation of people of colour in bisexual and wider LGBTQ communities, and the ways in which white researchers have historically exploited racialised subjects, it is probable that they felt less inclined to trust a white historian with their experiences.[64] This limits the representativeness of my interviewees, which is particularly unfortunate given that bisexuality was historically racialised, as I will discuss below, although I sought to address race by analysing how whiteness operated in these discourses and in the interviews.

In terms of geographical range, the vast majority of interviewees were based in England. Although two of the organisations I recruited through (Opening Doors London and London Bi Fest) were London-based, interviewees came from a range of locations within England: four in London, two in the South East, five in the Midlands, and two in Yorkshire. Two interviewees (Kate and Dave) lived in Scotland and their memories focussed on this, but Northern Ireland and Wales were unrepresented: although two interviews took place in Wales, both interviewees had moved there later in life and their memories focussed on England.

Like Summerfield and her fellow interviewers, I sought to present myself as friendly and 'nice-to-talk-to'.[65] This was largely successful, and in about half of the interviews our conversations went on for much longer than just the interview itself – with, for example, interviewees inviting me to stay for lunch or spending more time showing me saved photos, books or press clippings. Gender was probably a factor here, as this happened more frequently (although not exclusively) with female interviewees. I am also middle-class, and from a middle-

---

[64] Daphne Patai, "US Academics and Third World Women: Is Ethical Research Possible?", in *Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History*, ed. Sherna Berger Gluck and Daphne Patai (New York, NY: Routledge, 1991), 137; Sherry Gorelick, "Contradictions of Feminist Methodology", *Gender & Society* 5, no. 4 (1991): 349-477.
[65] Summerfield, *Women's Wartime Lives,* 21.

class background – this, coupled with the fact that I was studying for a PhD and therefore had extensive formal education, also affected the interview dynamic. The interviewees themselves were primarily middle-class but not overwhelmingly so, with careers ranging from gardener to academic, and many who were middle-class as adults came from more working-class origins. Some interviewees appeared keen to 'prove' or justify their own educational backgrounds, especially mentioning if they had themselves done or considered doing a PhD, which could be seen as a manifestation of insecurity. At the same time, as Jeska Rees experienced when interviewing second-wave feminists, it was not always the case that I was in a position of power, with educational and economic advantages over the interviewees.[66] Rees's interviewees were 'all educated, older than myself, and with a considerable record of participation in the political discourses of their times […] confident, eloquent and clear in their responses'.[67] This was not the case for all those I interviewed, but it did occur in some cases, especially if interviewees had been more actively involved in gay, lesbian or bisexual organisations. As with Rees, interviewees were all considerably older than myself – in Chapter Five, I will discuss how several interviewees referred to my age (early twenties) to make broader points about change over time, and whether they thought things were better or worse for young people of my generation.

As mentioned above, this reflexivity in oral history is by no means specific to queer oral history, and Fisher, Summerfield and Rees are more influenced by feminist oral history practices. However, there are also some issues of identity and presentation that are especially pertinent for queer oral histories. Ann Cvetkovich argues that it is *particularly* important for historians working on queer oral history to examine their impact on the interview scenario.[68] As well as exploring other aspects of the relationship between interviewer and interviewee, queer oral history asks how this relationship is affected if both parties are, or are believed to be, queer or

---

[66] Jeska Rees, "'Are you a lesbian?': Challenges in Recording and Analysing the Women's Liberation Movement in England", *History Workshop Journal* 69 (2010): 184.
[67] Rees, "Are you a lesbian?", 184.
[68] Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality and Lesbian Public Cultures* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 167.

LGBT. Although not all oral historians of these issues will themselves be LGBTQ, most writing on oral history methodology assumes that this will be the case – for example, Cvetkovich refers to gay and lesbian oral histories as forms of 'insider ethnography', and Esther Newton emphasises the importance of the 'background assumption' that she and her interviewees shared: 'that women are attracted to women and men to men'.[69]

Boyd and Ramírez argue that the intimacy that this 'sexual sameness' creates is rooted in the body, in visual cues relating to physical appearance: 'sexual embodiment' and 'body-based knowing'.[70] However, as Eisner argues, bisexuality and multiple-gender-attraction are 'not "known" to have any visual markers'.[71] As a result, bisexuals 'are routinely accused of fraudulence, perceived as invisible, and forced to deal with others' doubts'.[72] There were therefore no clear embodied or gendered 'visual markers' I gave to interviewees to indicate 'sexual sameness'. Often, interviewees tried to determine this themselves, either by directly asking about my sexuality (in a manner similar to Rees's interviewees asking whether she was a lesbian to determine which 'side' she was 'on'), or by asking loaded questions about what made me interested in the history of bisexuality *in particular*.[73] My general strategy was to tell the truth if prompted, but not to pre-empt this questioning – however, this inconsistency makes it difficult to determine how far interviewees' disclosures were affected by their perceptions of my identity. Furthermore, the concept of 'sexual sameness' suggests that people who use the same identity label are sexually 'the same', something that the range of identities, attractions and behaviours across my interviewees clearly disproved. One interviewee, Louise, explicitly stated: 'You can have somebody saying they're bisexual, and someone else saying they're bisexual, and their actual… the way their sexuality is expressed is completely different. *Especially* with bisexual people'.[74]

---

[69] Cvetkovich, *Archive of Feelings*, 167; Esther Newton, quoted in Boyd and Ramírez, *Bodies of Evidence*, 9-10.
[70] Boyd and Ramírez, *Bodies of Evidence*, 9.
[71] Eisner, *Bi*, 112.
[72] Eisner, *Bi*, 112.
[73] Rees, "Are you a lesbian?", 184.
[74] Interview with Louise, b. 1966, 27 July 2018.

Finally, my research questions and interest in the subject of bisexuality and multiple-gender-attraction *have* been affected by my own identity, but not just in the straightforward sense that interviewees were often suggesting. I didn't share with interviewees my own scepticism about the political and personal value of 'coming out', or my awareness of – but lack of direct participation in – LGBTQ and bisexual organisations. However, interviewees may have picked up on this through non-verbal cues, and my own views probably made my questioning and subsequent analysis of these topics more critical.

In queer oral history, the methodologies of oral history provide a unique opportunity to relate the ideas and conceptual analysis of queer theory, which can sometimes be overly-abstract, to the practical issues of recruiting interviewees and conducting and analysing interviews. The complexity of interviewees' life histories, their changing identities, and the ways that memories present a partial picture of the past rather than an essential 'truth', means that they challenge the idea of an 'unchanging and recognisable' sexual subjectivity.[75] Whilst I do not make a claim to the 'representativeness' of my interview sample, particularly in relation to race, my use of 'multiple-gender-attraction' was successful in recruiting interviewees with a range of identities, moving my methodology and analysis away from sexual identity politics and towards a queer oral history that focusses on the changing connections between attraction, relationships and identity expressed by interviewees.

The Long History of Bisexuality

In the previous section I discussed the *methodological* background of my thesis in reflexive oral history practices, especially queer oral history. I will now discuss some of the *empirical* background – the 'long history' of bisexuality and the factors affecting its position in the 1970s and 1980s. In what has become a standard reading of Michel Foucault, the 'scientia sexualis' of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries constructed categories of sexuality by setting

[75] Lewis, "British Queer History", 2.

apart 'unnatural' things.[76] Rather than simply repressing homosexuality, this 'specification' meant that the nineteenth-century homosexual was designated as a particular 'species' and thus 'became a personage'.[77] However, the history of bisexuality shows that the 'scientia sexualis' was actually more complex than this reading suggests. Bisexuality was seen not as a separate species or category, but as an 'originary state' potentially shared by everyone. This meant that the bisexual could not 'become a person' in the same way.

The word 'bisexual' was first used in 1859 by the anatomist Robert Bentley Todd, to refer to the possession of 'male' and 'female' physical characteristics in the same organism – what today we would understand as something similar to intersexuality or 'hermaphroditism'.[78] This form of bisexuality was believed to be 'located in the observable physical characteristics of plants, animals or humans', including male nipples and female facial hair.[79] The idea was quickly adopted in the wider context of the 'scientia sexualis': for example, Henry Havelock Ellis argued that 'at an early stage of development the sexes are indistinguishable'.[80] By the beginning of the twentieth century this meaning had shifted to describe a combination of masculine and feminine *psychical* (rather than physical) characteristics – what we might now describe as androgyny.[81] Hilary Malatino argues that this shift presaged the 'rift between biological sex and gender identity' in the mid-twentieth century, a rift which ultimately became foundational for gender studies and queer theory.[82]

The contemporary meaning of bisexuality, focussing on attraction rather than sexed or gendered characteristics, was first used around 1915.[83] However, the three meanings – sexed,

---

[76] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Volume 1: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (London: Penguin Books, 1998), 39.
[77] Foucault, *Sexuality Volume 1*, 43.
[78] Lachlan MacDowall, "Historicising Contemporary Bisexuality", *Journal of Bisexuality* 9, no. 1 (2009): 9.
[79] MacDowall, "Historicising Contemporary Bisexuality", 10.
[80] Henry Havelock Ellis, quoted in Storr, *Bisexuality Reader*, 17.
[81] MacDowall, "Historicising Contemporary Bisexuality", 4.
[82] Hilary Malatino, *Queer Embodiment: Monstrosity, Medical Violence, and Intersex Experience* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2019), 3.
[83] MacDowall, "Historicising Contemporary Bisexuality", 4.

gendered, and attraction-based bisexuality – coexisted in the same period and sometimes in the same texts. Freud's claim about 'universal bisexuality', which I will discuss in greater detail below, referred to bisexuality as both a combination of masculinity and femininity, *and* in terms of sexual object-choice.[84] In 1948 Alfred Kinsey, famous for his work on sexual behaviour, nevertheless described 'embryonic structures' as bisexual because they 'have the potentialities of both sexes'.[85] Following Malatino and Jules Gill-Peterson, this blurring of meanings occurred in part because 'gender' as a distinct category had not yet been invented, and 'bisexuality' as a linked category was similarly undefined.[86]

The key feature of bisexuality in these nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century discussions was that it was seen as an early stage of development from which every individual was expected to evolve. This was the difference between 'bisexuality' conceived of as sexual mixity, and 'hermaphroditism': while hermaphroditism was viewed as an 'anomaly' that occurred in adults, bisexuality was constructed as 'the originary state *from* which later developments are made'.[87] Even as meanings of bisexuality changed in the early twentieth century from a focus on sex or gender to a focus on behaviour and attraction, this sense of bisexuality as an 'originary state' was remarkably consistent. Richard von Krafft-Ebing stated in 1886 that 'the individual being is originally bisexual', Havelock Ellis wrote in 1897 about the 'latent organic bisexuality in each sex', and Freud wrote in 1905 that 'an originally bisexual physical disposition has, in the course of evolution, become modified into a unisexual one'.[88]

This construction of bisexuality as an 'originary state' left little room for adults who were attracted to multiple genders. Bisexuality was therefore stigmatised as 'immature' or 'primitive'.

---

[84] Sigmund Freud, quoted in Storr, *Bisexuality Reader*, 20-21.
[85] Alfred Kinsey, quoted in Storr, *Bisexuality Reader*, 37.
[86] Jules Gill-Peterson, *Histories of the Transgender Child* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2018), 35.
[87] Storr, "The Sexual Reproduction of 'Race'", 80.
[88] Richard von Krafft-Ebing, quoted in Storr, "The Sexual Reproduction of 'Race'", 82; Henry Havelock Ellis, quoted in Merl Storr, ed., *Bisexuality: A Critical Reader* (London: Routledge, 1999), 17; Sigmund Freud, quoted in Storr, *Bisexuality Reader*, 22.

The history of bisexuality was thus an inherently racialised one – seen as part of a 'primitive species'.[89] Bisexuality was understood not just in the ontogenetic sense (relating to the development of the foetus), but also in the phylogenetic sense (relating to the development of the 'species' or 'race').[90] Lachlan MacDowall argues that Todd's 1859 conceptualisation of bisexuality as a combination of male and female characteristics was central to Charles Darwin's theory of evolution: *The Origin of Species* was published in the same year as Todd's *Anatomy and Physiology*.[91] Darwin's theory of sex selection argued that 'as organisms evolved through a process of natural selection they showed greater signs of sexual differentiation' – that is, as species evolved they became less 'bisexual'.[92] Although this was based on experiments on animals, Gill-Peterson argues that 'the theory of life's natural bisexuality […] simply jumped, by analogy, to the human species' – Darwin cited studies on bisexuality in birds, but then added 'we see something of an analogous nature in the human species'.[93] This idea was taken up by eugenicists: 'the persistent *latency* of bisexual characteristics, which could "revert" under "certain conditions", carried a *primitivist* meaning'.[94] Krafft-Ebing argued that a strongly-marked distinction between the sexes was the product of advanced evolution: 'sexual difference runs parallel with the high level of the evolving process'.[95] His assessment of development was also heavily influenced by imperialist notions of 'struggle' and 'conquest': 'The individual being […] is originally bisexual, but in the struggle between the male and female elements either one or the other is conquered, and a monosexual being is evolved'.[96] As Storr argues, the concept of 'primitive' bisexuality demonstrates 'the constitutive importance of "race" and racial logic in the history of "western" sexuality […] sexual categories are also racial categories'.[97] Bisexuality was not just an early stage that occurred in animals or plants, but in less 'advanced' humans – either

[89] Storr, "The Sexual Reproduction of 'Race'", 86.
[90] Storr, "The Sexual Reproduction of 'Race'", 80.
[91] MacDowall, "Historicising Contemporary Bisexuality", 9.
[92] MacDowall, "Historicising Contemporary Bisexuality", 11.
[93] Gill-Peterson, *The Transgender Child*, 41.
[94] Gill-Peterson, *The Transgender Child*, 41.
[95] Richard von Krafft-Ebing, quoted in Storr, "The Sexual Reproduction of 'Race'", 80.
[96] Richard von Krafft-Ebing, quoted in Storr, "The Sexual Reproduction of 'Race'", 82.
[97] Storr, "The Sexual Reproduction of 'Race'", 85-86.

young children, or racial 'others'.

One effect of these sexological discourses is suggested by Chris Waters, who argues in relation to homosexuality before 1945 that being 'the object of medical and psychiatric investigation' inhibited group social and political identity.[98] Psychological and sexological discourses lead to the perception of individuals as 'atomised' case studies, 'the heightened interest in the individual and the etiology of his desires coming at the expense of any interest in his social being'.[99] Waters's focus on 'expert' knowledge means that he misses characterisations of homosexuality in popular media which *did* acknowledge the collective, for example through references to 'gangs', 'nests' or 'haunts'. However, it is helpful for understanding psychological and sociological discourses specifically, and usefully demonstrates that dominant psychological theories of sexuality tended to individualise the subject rather than treat them as a member of a group. Although Waters does not include bisexuality and multiple-gender-attraction in his analysis, the evidence suggests that the continuing influence of sexological tropes in discussions of bisexuality in the 1970s and 1980s meant that those who were attracted to multiple genders struggled to conceive of themselves as part of a social or political group, and were not regarded as such by others. Furthermore, it was not simply the fact that bisexuality was the subject of 'medical and psychiatric investigation' in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, but rather the specific *way* in which it was conceptualised by these investigations – as a stage of development – which meant that bisexuals were not considered to be a social or political grouping until much later than homosexuals, and certainly not by the 1970s.

Prior to the 1970s and 1980s, then, bisexuality was conceived of as linked to sexed and gendered mixity, as particularly 'immature' or 'primitive', and – most crucially – as an originary, potentially more 'natural' state from which individuals developed. It should be noted that these three key constructions of bisexuality were inherently linked. Referring to the racialisation of sex,

---

[98] Chris Waters, "The Homosexual as a Social Being in Britain", in *British Queer History: New Approaches and Perspectives*, ed. Brian Lewis (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), 190.
[99] Waters, "The Homosexual as a Social Being", 190.

Gill-Peterson argues that 'the framing of sex through racial plasticity occurred in a broader scientific milieu in Europe and the United States that defined living organisms, both human and nonhuman, as naturally "bisexual", a mix of masculine and feminine forms'.[100] The idea of bisexuality as 'natural', a mixture of 'masculine' and 'feminine', and a 'primitive' racialised category were all linked, because they all relied on the idea of bisexuality as an early stage of development.

By the 1970s and 1980s the term 'bisexual' had existed for over a century, but the concept of 'bisexuality' as we understand it today was still being established, and was still very much inflected by its earlier meanings. Firstly, early definitions of bisexuality as equivalent to sexed or gendered mixity continued to affect how the relationship between sex and gender was understood. Although by the 1970s and 1980s most people saw bisexuality as a term for sexual orientation, this was by no means universal – and, furthermore, associations with androgyny or gender transgression continued to be influential even where bisexuality was primarily defined in terms of attraction. In Wolff's 1977 study of bisexuality, she still referenced multiple different definitions.[101] Wolff was heavily influenced by earlier sexologists – her first chapter reviewed at length the work of Krafft-Ebing, Freud, Havelock Ellis, Kinsey and others. To the modern reader, her statements about bisexuality and gender are confusing and appear inherently contradictory – she argued that 'psychical hermaphroditism' was 'later called bisexuality', and that bisexuality was 'expressed first and foremost in bi-gender identity, which may or may not lead to bisexual orientation'.[102] Her third chapter, 'Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation', argued that gender identity had 'a direct influence' on sexual orientation, but 'must not be confused with it', but then stated that 'bio-psychological bisexuality is the keynote for the experience of a sense of maleness in a woman, and the sense of femaleness in a man'.[103] She also stated that, apart from the

[100] Gill-Peterson, *The Transgender Child*, 35.
[101] Wolff, *Bisexuality*, 1.
[102] Wolff, *Bisexuality*, 1.
[103] Wolff, *Bisexuality*, 52, 55.

'transvestites and transsexuals', 'all other subjects were conscious of the fact that their bi-gender identity and their bisexual inclinations went together. They loved both sexes, and by far the greater majority had both hetero- and homosexual relationships'.[104]

Wolff's use of phrases such as 'psychic hermaphroditism' and 'bio-psychological bisexuality' highlight the influence of these earlier sexological ideas on her theories about gender and sexuality. The apparent contradictions were a result of her attempts to unite these earlier logics with the more liberationist politics of the 1970s, resulting in a construction of bisexuality that was still very different to how we would understand it today. Her analysis of bisexuality was not uncritically accepted by readers in the 1970s, however. Although extracts of her book were published in *Gay News*, with a respectful preface – 'Dr Wolff hopes that its impact on members of her own profession – psychiatry – will be considerable' – subsequent reviews disputed Wolff's definition of bisexuality, and her attempts to link it to sex and gender.[105] For example, Marsaili Cameron argued that 'the more common usage of the term (and the one which the participants in the study seem to favour) surely now approximates the use of "heterosexual" and "homosexual" and indicates sexual orientation rather than the composition of the self'.[106] However, although Wolff's interviewees generally did focus on bisexuality as 'sexual orientation', they did not separate this from gender as strictly as Cameron suggested. I will discuss the role of gender and attraction in discussions of bisexuality in greater detail in Chapter Four; bisexual identity was still often linked to androgynous gender presentation during the 1970s and 1980s, in a way that demonstrates the persistence of earlier sexological constructions.

The racist and imperialist logic behind ideas of bisexuality also still occurred in the 1970s and 1980s – for example in the work of Colin MacInnes, the bisexual author known for his 'London Trilogy' of novels exploring black immigrant culture in London, and for his uncomfortable role as

---

[104] Wolff, *Bisexuality*, 62.
[105] Charlotte Wolff, "Swimming Against the Stream: Extracts from *Bisexuality: A Study*", *Gay News*, September 1977, 13-14.
[106] Marsaili Cameron, "Uneasy Assertions", *Gay* News, November 1977, 26.

an 'imperious patron of black migrants'.[107] In 1973 he wrote *Loving Them Both: A Study of Bisexuality and Bisexuals*.[108] The work was ostensibly a non-fiction study, but MacInnes adopted a much more confessional tone in setting forth his opinions about sexuality and gender: 'I don't think texts on any sexual topic are worth reading unless the writer is drawing, to some extent at least, on personal experience [… I have also drawn] on tales that have been told to me by those whom I know well'.[109] In one section, MacInnes characterised different 'peoples' in terms of their bisexuality, from the 'Celtic Fringe' to 'Caribbeans'.[110] He described Arabs, Greeks and Caribbeans as 'unusually bisexual', and stated that 'blacks regard a bed as a place of joy, and not as a confessional'.[111] The bisexuality of racial 'others', especially the subjects of former colonies, was portrayed as 'unselfconscious' and free from repression. As late as 2018, this idea of bisexuality was brought up by one interviewee, Curtis, who had a background in anthropology. He echoed some of the same ideas as MacInnes, again with the ostensibly positive interpretation that bisexuality was more 'natural':

> We've studied societies where there was clearly, erm, sex happening, er, with both sexes […] if you go out into the South American jungle, there are a few communities there who haven't been touched by Western civilisation […] in the non-Westernised or non-religious – non-Islamic – Islamised society, you know, the ones that haven't got this… more… *narrow* definition of what's permitted.[112]

These ideas of bisexuality as particular to 'uninhibited' racial others and untouched tribes links to efforts by bisexuals and their allies, also including MacInnes and Curtis, to argue that bisexuality's construction as a stage of development meant that it was more 'natural' or 'normal', which I will discuss more below. However, although those efforts were an attempt to redress stigma, this fetishisation of the supposed bisexuality of certain races was directly influenced by nineteenth-century ideas of bisexuality as 'primitive', a low stage in the evolutionary process and

---

[107] Nadia Ellis, "Black Migrants, White Queers and the Archive of Inclusion in Postwar London", *Interventions* 17, no. 6 (2015): 905.
[108] Colin MacInnes, *Loving Them Both: A Study of Bisexuality and Bisexuals* (London: Martin Brian & O'Keeffe Limited, 1973).
[109] MacInnes, *Loving Them Both*, 8.
[110] MacInnes, *Loving Them Both*, 41-47.
[111] MacInnes, *Loving Them Both*, 43.
[112] Interview with Curtis (pseudonym), b. 1958, 24 July 2018.

thus not fully human.

Another way in which this sexological concept of bisexuality as an early stage of development influenced the 1970s and 1980s was through the idea that bisexuals were more 'immature'. This was linked to patronising imperialist notions, but was also applied to white British bisexuals. As discussed above, the construction of bisexuality as an early stage in development left little room for adult bisexuality. Where adults were bisexual, then, the influence of particularly Freudian ideas led to the suggestion that something must have happened to arrest their 'normal' development into heterosexuality or homosexuality. For example, Wolff analysed 'early influences' on her study subjects at length, including their relationships to parents and siblings. Curtis also echoed these points in our interview, speculating about Freud's theories and whether his own identity had

> anything to do with my poor relationship with my mother […] I had such a *bad* relationship with my mother that probably turned me off the thought of being close to women, and I probably sought guys out because – women were dangerous, and that. I'm talking about, *primeval* thoughts, you know. But I've not done any Freudian analysis of that.[113]

Psychoanalytical discourses about bisexuality as an immature or primitive stage of development were thus still influential in the 1970s and 1980s – primarily on sexological discourses such as Wolff's, but also in more popular discourses, such as MacInnes's writings. Some interviewees referenced these ideas even in the twenty-first century. Although it was often not the intent of bisexuals who invoked these discourses, they delegitimised and stigmatised bisexuality, and mitigated against bisexuals' inclusion by gay and lesbian groups.

The most persistent way in which sexological understandings of bisexuality informed discourses in the 1970s and 1980s was through the idea of 'universal' bisexuality. This originated in the same developmentalist ideas discussed above, that bisexuality was an 'innate' stage from which adults developed into heterosexuality or homosexuality. Rather than stigmatising bisexuality as immature or primitive, however, and arguably as a *response* to this stigma, some

---

[113] Interview with Curtis (pseudonym), b. 1958, 24 July 2018.

people sought to develop a 'reverse discourse'. In the mid-twentieth century homophile movement, the sexological idea that homosexuals were 'inverts' was used as a reverse discourse to justify their claims for political and legal rights, on the basis that they could not 'choose' their sexual attraction and should therefore be pitied rather than criminalised.[114] In the 1970s and 1980s, bisexuals and their allies sought to suggest that bisexuality being an early stage of development meant that heterosexuality and homosexuality were the result of repression or social conditioning, and therefore deviations from the innate 'truth' of bisexuality.

As with ideas about bisexual immaturity, Freud was frequently referenced in these arguments: 'Many psychiatrists and psychologists, including Freud, have stated that bisexuality is the original state of the individual'.[115] Freud famously claimed that, because of this 'original bisexuality', 'all human beings are capable of making a homosexual object-choice and have in fact made one in their subconscious'.[116] Gore Vidal's remark that 'we are all bisexual to begin with' was also quoted approvingly throughout the 1970s, such as in a Campaign for Homosexual Equality (C.H.E.) discussion paper on bisexuality, which continued that 'conditioning, opportunity and habit account finally (and mysteriously) for sexual preferences'.[117] In 1987, Ken Livingstone stated that he believed 'we are all bisexual', which was reported jubilantly in *Bi-Monthly* as a form of bisexual representation: it was referred to as his 'coming out', and Livingstone was described, somewhat prematurely, as 'Britain's first "out" bisexual MP'.[118]

In 2018, some oral history interviewees still clearly viewed universal or innate bisexuality as a positive or helpful way to understand their identity. Ossian said 'according to Freud everyone was bisexual', and Curtis said that 'my view is – I think Kinsey had the similar view, that

---

[114] Foucault, *Sexuality Volume 1*, 101.
[115] C.H.E. Women's Campaign Committee, "Bisexuality" (Paper presented to the discussion group on bisexuality at C.H.E. Conference, Sheffield, 23 August 1975), 11, London School of Economics Library (hereafter LSE): HCA/CHE/8/29.
[116] Sigmund Freud, quoted in Storr, *Bisexuality Reader*, 25-26.
[117] Gore Vidal, "A Distasteful Encounter with William F. Buckley Jr", *Esquire*, September 1969, 143; Roger Baker, "Bisexuality" (Report to the Commission on Bisexuality presented at C.H.E. Conference, Malvern, 25 May 1974), 3, LSE: HCA/CHE/8/7.
[118] Anonymous, "We Are All Bisexual, claims Red Ken", *Bi-Monthly*, June 1987, 4.

potentially everybody's bisexual'.[119] Curtis was particularly influenced by sexologists, especially Kinsey, and 'came out' to colleagues by identifying himself as a '4.5 on the Kinsey Scale'.[120] He suggested that 'there probably aren't *that* many on three [on the Kinsey scale], but there's quite a lot… twos, fours, that sort of thing'.[121] Neil also said he thought that everyone was 'fundamentally bisexual', saying that 'on the gay side they suppress it, on the hetero side they suppress it', and people who identified as bisexual were therefore more 'open-minded' and honest with themselves about their 'true' nature.[122]

The 'reverse discourse' of describing bisexuality as natural or innate could therefore be seen as a parallel to homophile discourses about homosexuality being innate and unchangeable, although of course homophiles did not try to argue that it was innate to *everyone*. MacInnes described bisexuality as 'the ultimate norm […] even if a man or woman has never lain with anyone of the same sex, if they have never felt sensually towards someone of their own sex, then they are abnormal'.[123] This is an example of what Doan describes as 'slipping between the multiple meanings of the word "normal"' – both in the sense of something statistically average or 'standard', and in the more prescriptive sense of being 'free from any disorder'.[124] MacInnes was presumably attempting to subvert sexological 'norms', especially given that the example of 'abnormality' he referenced was exclusive *heterosexuality* (rather than homosexuality or bisexuality). Bisexuality was defined in this statement in terms of 'sensual feeling', or attraction, rather than sexual behaviour. Similar efforts can be seen in *Gay Flashes*, the newsletter of the Gay Liberation Front (GLF)'s Leeds branch, which presented multiple-gender-attraction as universal, although named it as 'gay to some extent' rather than bisexual: 'absolutely everyone is gay to

[119] Interview with Ossian, b. 1954, 13 August 2018; Interview with Curtis (pseudonym), b. 1958, 24 July 2018.
[120] Interview with Curtis (pseudonym), b. 1958, 24 July 2018.
[121] Interview with Curtis (pseudonym), b. 1958, 24 July 2018.
[122] Interview with Neil (pseudonym), b. 1958, 26 September 2018.
[123] MacInnes, *Loving Them Both*, 54.
[124] Laura Doan, "Marie Stopes's Wonderful Rhythm Charts: Normalising the Natural", *Journal of the History of Ideas* 78, no. 4 (October 2017): 598.

some extent. No one would have friends of their own sex if that weren't true'.[125] The definition of attraction here was stretched to include platonic friendship in order to maintain the idea that attraction to multiple genders was a universal norm, and that bisexuality (and, in GLF Leeds's case, homosexuality as well) was normal and open-minded.

Although it was not what most proponents of universal bisexuality intended or expected, this concept nevertheless had a detrimental effect on the potential for bisexual communities and a bisexual politics. The argument that all individuals were attracted to multiple genders, and that those who argued otherwise were simply repressing part of themselves, constructed bisexuality as more 'open-minded' but also involved a certain amount of cognitive dissonance. There would, presumably, be no point in conducting a study or discussion group on bisexuality if it was common to everyone. Eisner points out that this universalising construction 'diffuse[d] the meaning of bisexual existence' and therefore diffused bisexuality as a particular and distinct identity.[126] In Chapter Two, I will discuss bisexual politics and communities in more detail, and show that there were efforts, particularly from the 1980s onwards, to build a politics on the basis of generalised inclusivity. However, in practice these vague ideas of universality and inclusivity made it difficult to form an identity grouping with any coherence. Collective identity and community required a coherence that 'universalising' discourses of bisexuality denied. Bisexuals, if they were 'everyone', had no common interests or reason to identify as a group, and no justification for any political rights claims.

The constructions of bisexuality developed in the nineteenth and early twentieth century therefore continued to influence how bisexuality was understood in the 1970s and 1980s, and even when I conducted my interviews in the late 2010s. Initial links between bisexuality, intersexuality and androgyny still influenced some in the 1970s, although they were beginning to be replaced for most people by a definition of bisexuality that emphasised sexual attraction.

---

[125] Anonymous, "And After Tea We'll Have a Petition…", *Gay Flashes*, November 1972, 2.
[126] Eisner, *Bi*, 24.

Stigmatising constructions of bisexuality as 'immature', and racialised notions of bisexuality as 'primitive', were more long-lasting, although their effect on attitudes towards bisexuality is hard to separate from other factors, such as the individualising effect of sexological discourses more generally. The most enduring way that sexological discourses affected bisexuality was through the idea of it as 'universal' or 'natural'. Interviewees in 2018 were still echoing this idea, and it was prevalent in the 1970s and 1980s as well. Despite its supposedly 'positive' attitude towards bisexuality, suggesting that 'everyone' was bisexual 'deep down' made it *more* difficult, not less so, to organise communities or politics on the basis of bisexual identity or multiple-gender-attraction, as the rest of this thesis will explore.

Early sexological conceptualisations of bisexuality as an inchoate stage of development therefore rendered it both stigmatised and uncategorisable for many decades. Both of these effects meant that it was much more difficult for bisexuals to create their own political identity grouping, because they had no coherent identity category from which they could develop a politics of identity. The stigma created by racialised ideas of bisexuality as 'primitive' also worked alongside a stigma that came from multiple-gender-attraction being seen as 'psychologically immature' and therefore potentially the root of emotional instability. This meant that advocating for those who were attracted to multiple genders was seen as politically risky, mitigating against their inclusion by gay and lesbian groups. It was also one reason why many people attracted to multiple genders might not identify as bisexual. My use of 'multiple-gender-attraction' enables me to include these people in my analysis, without retroactively applying the label of 'bisexual' to them.

Thesis Overview

This thesis is divided into two sections. In the first, 'Communities and Politics', I explore the politics of bisexuality and multiple-gender-attraction, and how they developed unevenly in response to the experience of exclusion from gay and lesbian groups in the 1970s and 1980s.

Chapter One focusses on this exclusion, which was based on dichotomous politics held by

both gay liberationists and lesbian feminists. Gay liberationists excluded bisexuality and multiple-gender-attraction because their radicalism relied on a binary of 'gay' and 'straight' which associated bisexuality with 'straightness'. Bisexuality and attraction to multiple genders were also hyper-sexualised, and thus excluded from lesbian feminism because of a constructed dichotomy between the sexual and the political. The exclusion of bisexuality and multiple-gender-attraction from radical liberationist groups challenges historical narratives about the 'queer' inclusivity of gay liberation, and of radical liberation politics more generally.

Chapter Two focusses on how bisexual communities and politics developed in response, striving for independence but unable to separate themselves from the still-persistent experience of exclusion. Bisexual politics were thus characterised by a paradoxical rejection of gay and lesbian politics, and a desire for inclusivity. This chapter therefore critiques the triumphalist narratives of many bisexuals and scholars of bisexuality that portray bisexuality as inherently more radical, diverse and inclusive. Rather, the nascent bisexual communities that developed towards the end of the period were ultimately vague and inaccessible to many.

The second section, 'Bisexual Stories', focusses on some of the implications of these political negotiations for the life stories told by people attracted to multiple genders. In this, I analyse the stories told by my interviewees, but also by selected Hall-Carpenter interviewees and Wolff's study subjects. I compare them to the stories told in written sources, primarily in the gay press and the publications of gay liberation groups.

In Chapter Three, I compare narratives of 'coming out', and argue that bisexual interviewees and those attracted to multiple genders were more likely to resist dominant 'coming out' narratives. Instead, people attracted to multiple genders told more complex stories that accounted for changing understandings of identity, differing degrees of visibility and the lack of community that could provide 'resolution'. Although Boyd has expressed concern about her interviewees undermining efforts to 'queer' oral history, bisexual 'coming out stories' highlight

that interviewees *did* find ways to articulate their experiences outside mainstream narratives.[127]

Chapter Four focusses on narratives about relationships and attraction. Histories of love and intimacy often focus on heterosexual couples' experiences of courtship and marriage.[128] Queer activist histories, on the other hand, tend to focus less on romantic and sexual relationships.[129] In this chapter, I bring together these divergent historiographies by exploring narratives of bisexual relationships, which could be same- or different-gender, or both at the same time. In these narratives, the key difference was change over time – earlier sources tended to display very different attitudes to relationships and attraction, especially in relation to gender, than my interviewees in the 2010s. In this, I argue, we can see some of the long-term effects of earlier criticisms of bisexual relationships as dishonest and misogynistic, ideas which interviewees were keen to disavow.

Finally, Chapter Five considers popular memories, and the narratives that my interviewees told about the 1970s and 1980s. In these narratives, interviewees tended to distance themselves from dominant 'popular narratives' about, for example, economic and political crisis – but they aligned with what could be described as broader 'LGBT'-themed narratives of the period, praising the 1970s as a decade of liberation and potential that was sullied by internal divisions and external hostility in the 1980s. While these 'LGBT' narratives are not as pervasive as other popular memories, recent significant anniversaries and ensuing public discussion mean that these understandings of the past are becoming more widely disseminated.[130] There was not, therefore, a single 'popular memory' of the past to which interviewees conformed or from which they sought to differentiate themselves; rather, there

---

[127] Boyd, "Who is the subject?", 186.
[128] Claire Langhamer, *The English in Love: The Intimate Story of an Emotional Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Marcus Collins, *Modern Love: An Intimate History of Men and Women in Twentieth-Century Britain* (London: Atlantic Books, 2003).
[129] A notable exception to this is Matt Cook, *Queer Domesticities: Homosexuality and Home Life in Twentieth-Century London* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).
[130] For example, the 50th anniversary of the Sexual Offences Act in 2017, and the 30th anniversary of Section 28 in 2018.

were several narratives about the 1970s and 1980s from which they selected to illustrate different points about their lives.

In sum, this thesis charts the emergence of the category 'bisexual' through the political pressures of the 1970s and 1980s, with a particular focus on the lived experiences of those attracted to more than one gender. It intervenes in histories of sexuality and radical politics, arguing that gay and lesbian liberation politics excluded people attracted to multiple genders during the 1970s and 1980s and challenging historical narratives about 'queer' inclusivity and the 'liberatory moment'. I also pioneer the new concept of 'multiple-gender-attraction', moving beyond identity labels to focus on potential attraction. This conceptual innovation, and attention to the under-researched area of bisexuality and attraction to multiple genders more broadly, will further develop the field of queer oral history and queer critical history. When queer theory acknowledges bisexuality, it can too often valorise it as particularly 'queer' and subversive, or criticise it for re-inscribing binaries of gender and sexuality. Through a focus on multiple-gender-attraction, my dissertation moves beyond the limits of these dichotomous approaches to analyse more broadly how the connections between attraction, relationships and identity changed over time.

PART ONE

Communities and Politics

Chapter One

Exclusions

No formal bisexual groups existed in Britain during the 1970s. As a result, bisexuality and multiple-gender-attraction at the time were experienced through communities and networks that did not specifically relate or cater to them. Initially, bisexuals sought to portray themselves as a subset of a broader gay and lesbian community, arguing for inclusion on the basis of their similarity to gay men and lesbians – for example *Bi-Monthly* argued in 1985, in relation to London Lesbian and Gay Centre, that 'we understood the Centre was established to be a Community Centre and we are part of that Community'.[1] Over time, however, bisexuality became increasingly associated with an *independent* bisexual community that sought to define its own politics.[2] In Chapter Two I will focus on the development of this 'independent' bisexual community and politics, which was nevertheless still plagued by a lack of clarity about its relationship to gay men and lesbians. This chapter focusses on the origins of some of those conflicts and uncertainties, in the treatment of bisexuality and multiple-gender-attraction by gay and lesbian groups. As the title suggests, the approach that most of these groups took towards bisexuality and multiple-gender-attraction was one of exclusion.

Many critiques of this exclusion, especially since the late 1980s, have focussed on the issue of 'bisexual visibility', and visibility that is achieved by *naming* in particular.[3] The exclusion of the word 'bisexual' in the names of organisations or events such as the 'Campaign for Homosexual Equality', the 'London Lesbian and Gay Centre' or 'Lesbian and Gay Pride' is therefore presented as damning evidence of bisexual exclusion from the relevant community; vice-versa, the inclusion of the word is seen not just as a symbolic victory, but an actual one. This was the case for some of the interviewees I spoke to. Nigel (b. 1963) said of his university gay society in the early 1980s

---

[1] David Smith, "Banned: Bisexual Groups banned from the Lesbian & Gay Centre", *Bi-Monthly*, April 1985, 3.
[2] Clare Hemmings, *Bisexual Spaces*, 86.
[3] Eisner, *Bi*, 306; Hemmings, *Bisexual Spaces,* 86-87.

that 'it wasn't LGB-T-Q-I, erm… it was, er, it was literally a gay society. And I thought, well that's not me'.[4] Curtis (b. 1958) remembered 'the *gay* police association, the *gay* this, the gay liberation front, and whatever', and how he did not feel he could be part of it.[5] Louise (b. 1966) said that bisexuality didn't feel like a 'tenable' identity for her, because 'It was like "Lesbians, Lesbians, Lesbians" […] Nobody was running a group for bi girls, there were *lesbian* youth workers, and they were running groups for lesbians'.[6] Dave (b. 1960) recalled a rally in Edinburgh during the 1980s where a group of bisexuals sought to actively challenge the lack of named inclusion in speeches: 'Peter Tatchell was giving a talk, and every time he said "lesbian and gay", you know, a group of us would shout "*And Bisexual!*" at the top of our voice'.[7] A refusal to name bisexuality did therefore make some bisexuals feel excluded by gay and lesbian groups, and some sought to actively redress this.

However, other interviewees were less concerned with the naming of bisexuality, especially in the 1970s context. 'Gay' was seen by many in the 1970s as a catch-all term to encompass all non-straight people, including those attracted to multiple genders, or who might identify as bisexual as well as gay. Some interviewees said that focussing on 'gay' or 'gay and lesbian' was a strategic decision to emphasise what was most oppressed, and present a united front to a hostile straight world. For example, Kate (b. 1960) recalled questioning 'how important is it to use "bisexual", in, in the kind of general political world out there, when "lesbian and gay" is still such a – disputed territory?'.[8] She was concerned that describing herself as bisexual 'could kind of muddy the waters', although she added that she began to change her mind about this in the early- to mid-1980s.[9] Gwen (b. 1951) echoed a similar point, although she continued to identify primarily as 'not straight' at the time of our interview: 'I didn't want to kind of – muddy

[4] Interview with Nigel, b. 1963, 12 January 2019.
[5] Interview with Curtis (pseudonym), b. 1958, 24 July 2018.
[6] Interview with Louise, b. 1966, 27 July 2018.
[7] Interview with Dave, b. 1960, 11 January 2020.
[8] Interview with Kate, b. 1960, 31 August 2019.
[9] Interview with Kate, b. 1960, 31 August 2019.

the water by saying "well, I'm not, sort of, completely lesbian", you know'.[10] Ossian (b. 1954) even claimed that the leadership of the South London branch of GLF 'were all bi – bisexual […] But they had a – they went for the identifying as gay, erm, the main – male/male attraction thing, because that was what was oppressed'.[11] Identifying as 'gay' was therefore seen as a matter of politics. Not using the word 'bisexual', either in relation to one's own identity or in the naming and publications of organisations, did not necessarily mean that those who were bisexual or attracted to multiple genders were inevitably excluded.

On the other hand, the construction of gay and lesbian identity as more 'political', and bisexuality as less 'political', was itself a form of exclusion. The dichotomous ways that lesbian and gay groups understood their own politics, and the ways that they defined bisexual politics (or lack thereof), were more significant and effective forms of exclusion than simply failing to include 'bisexual' alongside 'lesbian and gay' in their publications and speeches. Bisexuality and multiple-gender-attraction were generally excluded from gay liberation politics because they were linked to 'straightness', which liberationists considered diametrically opposed to being 'gay'. Bisexuals and people attracted to multiple genders were excluded from lesbian feminist politics because they were viewed as particularly 'sexual', which was seen as mutually exclusive with 'political' identities and activism. This chapter focusses more on this form of exclusion – on the basis of politics – than simply 'naming' or lack of it. These two types of exclusion could be linked: for example, one of the ways in which GLF dealt with the political problem posed by bisexuality and multiple-gender-attraction was by refusing to discuss bisexuality, and the naming of the London Lesbian and Gay Centre was used to justify the exclusion of bisexual groups on the basis that they were not part of the community that the Centre was designed to serve. However, lack of named bisexual inclusion was not the only or the most significant form of exclusion in the 1970s and 1980s. As I will argue, the exclusion of bisexuality and multiple-gender-attraction from lesbian

[10] Interview with Gwen (pseudonym), b. 1951, 9 October 2018.
[11] Interview with Ossian, b. 1954, 13 August 2018.

and gay political theorising was much more effective, long-lasting, and difficult to redress.

The specific ways in which bisexuality was excluded varied across different organisations. As I will show, 'moderate' gay liberation groups were more inclusive of bisexuality than their 'radical' counterparts during the 1970s, as their attempts to focus on commonalities between gay and straight people constructed sexuality and politics as a spectrum rather than a binary. Attention to bisexuality and attraction to multiple genders therefore challenges historical narratives about the 'queer' inclusivity of gay liberation and of 1970s radical politics more generally. It also contributes to a reappraisal of 'moderate' groups such as C.H.E., often dismissed by historians as bureaucratic and conformist. In this, I am following recent moves in queer history to re-evaluate other, similar groups such as the Homosexual Law Reform Society (HLRS), the Mattachine Society in the US, and Arcadie in France.[12] The exclusion of bisexuality and multiple-gender-attraction also changed over time: by the 1980s, the silences and lack of acknowledgment of bisexuality demonstrated by gay liberationists had hardened into an outright, albeit short-lived, 'ban' of bisexual groups from the London Lesbian and Gay Centre. Another nuance is in relation to the differences between 'multiple-gender-attraction' and bisexual identity: attitudes towards multiple-gender-attraction differed from those towards named bisexuality, and were often more inclusive. In general, however, these groups did not 'recognise bisexuality as discrete (or viable)'.[13]

This chapter will first discuss the exclusion of bisexuality and multiple-gender-attraction by the gay liberation movement, focussing primarily on the 1970s, and then lesbian feminist communities, primarily in the 1980s. This structure is partly to reflect interviewees' narratives. Many interviewees who had been involved in the gay liberation movement of the 1970s had

---

[12] David Minto, "Mr Grey goes to Washington: The Homophile Internationalism of Britain's Homosexual Law Reform Society", in *British Queer History: New Approaches and Perspectives*, ed. Brian Lewis (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), 219-243; Martin Duberman, *Stonewall* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1993), 108-109; Julian Jackson, *Living in Arcadia: Homosexuality, Politics and Morality in France from the Liberation to AIDS* (Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 2009).
[13] Hemmings, "Feminist Methodology", 295.

become disillusioned with or exhausted by activism by the 1980s, and so had stopped being involved with organised gay or lesbian groups. Those who spoke about lesbian feminism in the interviews had often not been involved in these communities until the late 1970s or early 1980s, and so could not speak to the earlier period. However, this chapter structure also reflects the points at which gay liberation and lesbian feminism interacted with bisexuality and multiple-gender-attraction most directly.

In practice, of course, many lesbian feminists were also involved in the gay liberation movement of the 1970s – women left GLF en masse in 1972, and C.H.E. in 1977, after years of poor gender representation, but individual women remained involved in these groups throughout the period.[14] Lesbian feminists in the 1970s were also part of the Women's Liberation Movement, which adopted the 'sixth demand' of 'an end to discrimination against lesbians' in 1974. Specifically lesbian groups, independent of gay liberation or women's liberation, also existed from the early 1970s (the first Gay Women's Conference was in April 1974, the National Lesbian Newsletter was set up in 1975, and Lesbian Line was founded in 1977).[15] Gay liberation can also be seen as continuing beyond the 1970s – although GLF split in the mid-1970s, and C.H.E.'s membership shrank considerably from the early 1980s, groups such as Switchboard, Icebreakers, Organisation for Lesbian and Gay Alliance (OLGA), Stonewall and OutRage! could all be considered examples of the gay liberation movement continuing into the 1980s and 1990s.

Nevertheless, the 'long 1970s', defined here as the period between the Sexual Offences Act in 1967 and the beginning of the AIDS crisis in 1982, *was* a particular historical moment for the relationship between multiple-gender-attraction and gay liberation. In the 1970s the tensions between 'radical' and 'moderate' sexual politics were being navigated by groups such as GLF and C.H.E. in such a way that, for a time, C.H.E.'s politics could accommodate bisexuals even while GLF

---

[14] Jeffrey Weeks, *Coming Out: Homosexual Politics in Britain, from the Nineteenth Century to the Present* (London: Quartet Books, 1977), 200; Anonymous, "Good Luck, Good Will and Goodbye", *Gay News*, September 1977, 1-2.
[15] Sheila Jeffreys, *The Lesbian Revolution: Lesbian Feminism in the UK, 1970 – 1990* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018), 24-26.

rejected them. The 'long 1980s', between the publication of 'Political Lesbianism: The Case Against Heterosexuality' in 1979, and the 'serious decline' of lesbian feminism in 1990, were also a particular period in the relationship between bisexuality and lesbian feminist politics.[16] Although lesbian feminism existed in the 1970s, it was not until the end of this decade that lesbian feminists had developed an established politics, drawing on both the gay liberation and women's liberation movements, and had begun to police their own boundaries in relation to topics such as political lesbianism and the 'lesbian sex wars'. It is for this reason that I have chosen to structure the chapter to focus primarily on gay liberation in the 1970s and then primarily on lesbian feminism in the 1980s.

This chapter argues that bisexuality and multiple-gender-attraction were generally excluded from gay liberation groups in the 1970s, especially radical groups such as GLF, because they were associated with 'straightness'. Initially the more 'moderate' C.H.E. was more accepting, although this declined over the course of the decade as it, too, became more associated with liberationist politics. Bisexuality and multiple-gender-attraction were excluded from lesbian feminist communities in the 1980s because they were seen as particularly sexual, threatening the ideas of lesbianism as a political choice, and allowing the incursion of men into women-only spaces. Focussing on a specific context – how gay and lesbian groups responded to bisexuality and multiple-gender-attraction – challenges the rhetoric of 'liberation' in sexual politics, and has implications for our understanding of radical politics more widely.

The Gay Liberation Movement[17]

In this section, I will focus on the two main groups in the English gay liberation movement of the 1970s – the 'liberationist' GLF and the more 'moderate' C.H.E.. The British GLF was formed at the London School of Economics in 1970, inspired by the New York Gay Liberation Front and

[16] Jeffreys, *The Lesbian Revolution*, 172.
[17] Much of the material in this section has been published in Martha Robinson Rhodes, "Bisexuality, Multiple-Gender-Attraction, and Gay Liberation Politics in the 1970s", *Twentieth Century British History* (2020): 1-24.

other contemporary radical movements including Black Power, women's liberation, and counter-cultural groups.[18] GLF wanted to 'use our righteous anger to uproot the present oppressive system', which comprised mainly of the family, education, the Church, the media and the law, and 'form a new order, and a liberated lifestyle'.[19] GLF was primarily London-based, but a network of groups quickly developed in other English towns and cities such as Manchester, Bradford and Brighton in the early 1970s.[20] However, the intensity of its early years was difficult to maintain in the long term. By 1973, internal divisions had led to the disintegration of the group on a national level, although local GLF groups continued to be active into the mid-1970s.[21]

C.H.E. has generally been portrayed as the 'bureaucratic' and 'traditional' foil to GLF's radicalism. Even *Amiable Warriors*, the 'official' history of C.H.E. that seeks to establish a place for the group in the historical record, ruefully acknowledges that 'in popular gay mythology […] if GLF is a rainbow, C.H.E. is beige'.[22] Stephen Brooke describes C.H.E. as 'unashamedly mainstream', 'eschew[ing] any analysis of oppression' and constructing the homosexual subject as 'respectable and private'.[23] Lucy Robinson acknowledges that C.H.E. did share many of GLF's goals and campaigns, and that the division between liberationists and moderates was therefore 'somewhat arbitrary'.[24] However, she also argues that the contrasts between GLF and C.H.E. were not just differences of 'style', but deep-seated differences in politics: 'C.H.E. was campaigning for the right not to be controversial'.[25]

However, C.H.E. was less 'traditional' and 'respectable' than these analyses suggest. It was founded in 1969 as the Committee for Homosexual Equality, and was renamed the *Campaign* for

---

[18] Robinson, *Gay Men and the Left*, 66.
[19] GLF, *Gay Liberation Front Manifesto* (1971), 1, LSE: MCINTOSH/10/4.
[20] Lisa Power, *No Bath But Plenty of Bubbles: An Oral History of the Gay Liberation Front 1970 – 1973* (London: Cassell, 1995), 296.
[21] For example, Bradford GLF distributed a pamphlet entitled *Gay Liberation: Bradford 1975* at the C.H.E. Conference in Sheffield (August 1975) LSE: HCA/GLF/11. One interviewee, Ossian, b. 1954, described joining South London GLF in 1976, although he said its actions had mostly ceased by then.
[22] Peter Scott-Presland, *Amiable Warriors: A History of the Campaign for Homosexual Equality and its Times Volume 1: A Space to Breathe, 1954 – 1974* (London: Paradise Press, 2015), xvi.
[23] Brooke, *Sexual Politics*, 231.
[24] Robinson, *Gay Men and the Left*, 79.
[25] Robinson, *Gay Men and the Left*, 80.

Homosexual Equality in 1971 as part of an effort to become more politically-oriented. It emerged from the North Western Homosexual Law Reform Committee (NWHLRC), based in Manchester. The NWHLRC was considered a more 'radical' part of the homophile law reform movement in the 1960s, because it sought to set up gay commercial clubs, rather than advocating homosexuals 'integrate discreetly'.[26] C.H.E.'s institutional history therefore shows that it was less preoccupied with presenting the 'image of the safe homosexual' than its radical critics suggested.[27] Compared to GLF, though, C.H.E. was markedly more conventional. In contrast to GLF's anti-hierarchical anti-structure, C.H.E. had a formal constitution and was run by an elected Executive Committee. Its members paid a regular subscription, and met at annual conferences to hear reports and vote on resolutions for the year ahead. The activist and writer Laurence Collinson summed up what many saw as the differences between GLF and C.H.E.: 'C.H.E. is an organisation; GLF is a way of life'.[28]

The politics of each group changed over the course of the 1970s. Throughout the decade and into the 1980s, C.H.E. struggled to balance the desires of members who wanted it to focus on social activities and those who wanted to campaign more actively. Within GLF, too, there were significant debates and differences of opinion. There were splits between what Jeffrey Weeks described as 'the socialists' and 'the counter-culture' and between 'the activists' and 'the feminists', as well as between women and men; divisions which ultimately led the national GLF to fall apart.[29] In addition, local GLF and C.H.E. groups often differed from their national bodies on matters of ideology as well as specific policy.

GLF and C.H.E. are only two examples of groups active in the gay liberation movement of the period, chosen to reflect the groups discussed most by my interviewees, as well as the volume of archival evidence that exists for each. Similar patterns of attitudes towards bisexuality and

---

[26] Power, *No Bath*, 10.
[27] Don Milligan, "OUTSIDERS: Why I won't join C.H.E.", *OUT,* December 1976, 5.
[28] Laurence Collinson, quoted in Weeks, *Coming Out*, 190.
[29] Weeks, *Coming Out,* 200.

multiple-gender-attraction can be found in other 'liberationist' or 'moderate' groups in England and Wales in the 1970s – such as the radical Gay Left Collective that developed after GLF's disintegration, or the homophile Albany Trust, founded in 1958.

In Scotland, the Scottish Minorities Group (SMG), renamed the Scottish Homosexual Rights Group in 1978, was often portrayed as the 'Scottish equivalent of C.H.E.', and its tactics were similarly moderate.[30] However, there were significant differences in the Scottish context that meant gay liberation politics from England and Wales could not be neatly transplanted north of the border. Firstly, sex between men was still illegal in Scotland until 1980. Although there do not appear to have been any prosecutions after 1967 where consensual sex occurred between two adult men in private – that is, in practice the same restrictions as applied in England and Wales – Jeffrey Meek highlights that the risk of being arrested was still seen as a significant threat by many gay and bisexual men.[31] The legal disparities between Scotland and England and Wales also meant that SMG spent more time than either C.H.E. or GLF on 'relentless engagement' and campaigning about 'the need for law reform' during the 1970s.[32] Secondly, GLF was a much less significant force in Scotland – its Edinburgh branch was only active for three years before 'fading away' in 1974.[33] This lack of a strong GLF presence meant that SMG did not have to respond to external pressure from radicals in the same way as C.H.E.. This made it easier for SMG to engage with 'traditional' authorities such as the Church, and could also be a reason why bisexuals in Scotland generally had more productive interactions with gay and lesbian groups than their English counterparts – Edinburgh Bisexual Group was able to meet in the Edinburgh Lesbian and Gay Centre from its inception, unlike in London, and Kate remembered that SMG co-founder Ian Dunn was 'very open' to bisexual equality alongside lesbians and gay men.[34] As I will discuss below, GLF was particularly exclusionary towards bisexuality, so its relative absence in Scotland

[30] Scott-Presland, *Amiable Warriors*, 262.
[31] Meek, *Queer Voices*, 40.
[32] Meek, *Queer Voices*, 103.
[33] Ian Dunn, "Scotland: against the odds", in *Radical Records: Thirty Years of Lesbian and Gay History, 1957 – 1987*, eds. Bob Cant and Susan Hemmings (London: Routledge, 1988), 24.
[34] Meek, *Queer Voices*, 111; Dunn, "Scotland", 26; Interview with Kate, b. 1960, 31 August 2019.

may have left space for a more conciliatory, less binary approach to multiple-gender-attraction.

In Northern Ireland, gay rights activism was uniquely affected by the context of the Troubles, although Patrick James McDonagh argues that both gay rights organisations and the opposition to them (the Save Ulster from Sodomy campaign) were unusual in uniting individuals across the sectarian divide.[35] As in Scotland, sex between men continued to be prohibited in law during the 1970s, and so the Northern Ireland Gay Rights Association (NIGRA) was, like SMG, more focussed on law reform. Unlike both SMG and C.H.E., NIGRA's campaigning involved appealing to the European Commission of Human Rights, introducing a transnational dimension to their activism. The tensions between 'radical' and 'moderate' groups did not play out the same way in Northern Ireland or Scotland as in England and Wales, then, which in turn affected their engagement with bisexuality and multiple-gender-attraction.

One of the most influential understandings of bisexuality during the 1970s was the idea of it as a combination of heterosexual and homosexual elements, often expressed in numerical terms. The singer George Melly referred to himself in 1972 as '75% hetero-, 25% homosexual', while a husband and wife in a 'mixed marriage' interviewed for *Gay News* described themselves as being 'really bisexual and not 100% gay' and '95% heterosexual', respectively.[36] Bisexuality was thus seen as a 'synthesis' of identities, rather than an independent identity in its own right. This 'synthesis' conceptualisation was sometimes seen as a 'positive' interpretation of bisexuality, suggesting that bisexuals might have a greater understanding of both gay people and straight people – a 1974 discussion paper by C.H.E. claimed that 'the bisexual offers a bridge between the gayworld and the straightworld', which 'should be taken advantage of, for everybody's benefit'.[37]

However, the construction of bisexuality as a combination of heterosexual and homosexual led to its exclusion by gay liberation groups. GLF's radical politics were based on a

---

[35] Patrick James McDonagh, "Queering Northern Ireland during the 'Troubles'", *Writing The Troubles* blog, 18 February 2019, https://writingthetroublesweb.wordpress.com/2019/02/18/queering-the-troubles/.
[36] Gini Stevens, "George Melly", *Lunch*, May 1972, 6; Hennegan, "Ray and Penny", 20.
[37] Baker, "Bisexuality" 1974 discussion paper, 7.

binary division between heterosexual and homosexual. Bisexuality, understood as a synthesis of these elements, was excluded and made invisible by this binary. When bisexuality was seen as 'partially straight', it could also be linked to the problems that GLF associated with 'straight' politics, and thus dismissed. In contrast, the more 'moderate' C.H.E. was initially less reliant on a binary division between heterosexual and homosexual, and was therefore more able to incorporate bisexuality and multiple-gender-attraction into its political analysis. By the second half of the 1970s, however, C.H.E. had also become more radical and its attention to bisexuality and multiple-gender-attraction had dwindled.

The Gay Liberation Front

In 1971, GLF began its 'most successful public campaign', against Dr David Reuben's book *Everything You Ever Wanted to Know about Sex – but were afraid to ask*.[38] The book's marketing framed it as popular psychiatry, both humorous and educational, but it presented homophobic and sexist stereotypes as fact.[39] GLF linked the book to wider problems with psychiatry, which still classed gay men as promiscuous and lesbians as aberrant. Before the campaign began in earnest, GLF's Counter-Psychiatry Group circulated a list of thirty-five objections, asking members to select twenty to include in a letter to Reuben's publishers. Two of these draft objections concerned Reuben's failure to address bisexuality – Number One rebutted his publishers' claim that the book left 'no facet of human sexuality unexplored' by pointing out that there was 'no description of bisexuality', and Number Fourteen criticised the fact that Reuben made 'no mention of the homosexual element in us all, nor of bisexuality'.[40] By the publication of the final letter, however, which had 158 signatures, both of the points referencing bisexuality had been removed.[41]

---

[38] Robinson, *Gay Men and the Left*, 73.
[39] David Reuben, *Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Sex – But Were Afraid to Ask* (London: W.H. Allen, 1971).
[40] GLF Counter-Psychiatry Group, *Everything You Wanted to Know About Dr Reuben and Never Dared to Ask* (draft objections to Reuben's book for discussion, 1971), 1-2, LSE: MCINTOSH/7/1.
[41] Power, *No Bath*, 57-58.

It is somewhat ironic that GLF's criticism of Reuben's exclusion of bisexuality from his book was eventually excluded, in turn, from the final draft of its letter – and ironic, too, because GLF itself very rarely mentioned bisexuality. There were slightly more references to multiple-gender-attraction, although these were still scarce: for example, *Come Together* briefly discussed abortion's relevance to gay people, on the basis that 'most of us have had some heterosexual experience'.[42] Local GLF groups sometimes included more discussion: *Gay Flashes*, a newsletter produced by GLF's Leeds group, referred to the Freudian ideas of multiple-gender-attraction as universal – 'absolutely everyone is gay to some extent' – although, as discussed in the Introduction, the reasoning for this extended to same-sex friendships and platonic 'attraction'.[43] Birmingham GLF's newsletter included one article questioning whether bisexuals 'really exist', but later in the 1970s also included some articles by bisexual women that were more sympathetic.[44] However, both Birmingham and Leeds GLF were separate from national GLF at the time the articles were published.[45] On the national level, GLF was generally silent on the issue of bisexuality and multiple-gender-attraction.

This silence was in large part because bisexuality, conceived of as a combination of heterosexual and homosexual as discussed above, posed a problem for GLF's binary understanding of 'gay' and 'straight'. *Come Together* mused that 'the differences between gay people and straight people are important, and maybe we haven't made enough of them […] we have within our grasp a chance of more equal relationships with each other than they have'.[46] GLF's *Manifesto* suggested that gay people were inherently against heterosexual marriage and the family, and were therefore inherently more progressive: 'Gay shows the way. In some ways we

---

[42] GLF Media Group, "Abortions", *Come Together,* November 1971, 3.
[43] Anonymous, "Petition…", 2.
[44] Ray, "Bisexuals – do they really exist?", *Birmingham Gay Liberation Front's Newsletter*, undated, c. 1973/4; Shirley Paul, "I'm coming out", *Gladrag*, January 1976, 10-11; Mary Wood, "Bisexuality", *Gladrag*, Summer 1977, 4.
[45] In the same issue of *Gay Flashes*, as the "Petition" article, GLF Leeds underlined its 'independence from any other National Homophile movement' by renaming itself Gay Liberation, Leeds. By the mid-1970s when Birmingham GLF was featuring articles on bisexuality, GLF had already dissolved on a national level.
[46] GLF Media Group, "being what gay is", *Come Together*, May 1971, 2.

are *already* more advanced than straight people. We are already outside the family and we have already, in part at least, rejected the "masculine" or "feminine" roles'.[47] This binary distinction between 'gay' and 'straight', and the reverse discourse that positioned gay people as more 'advanced', was used to justify GLF's 'Gay is Good' approach and assertive emphasis on pride rather than assimilation. However, bisexuality – especially when it was conceived of as a 'middle ground' between heterosexuality and homosexuality – made this sharp distinction impossible to maintain.

The action against Reuben's book continued after the initial letter. GLF members leafleted WH Smith in protest at its decision to stock the book, and added pages into unsold copies critiquing Reuben's assertions or falsely claiming to offer full refunds. Eventually, the publishers suggested that GLF could publish its own rebuttal of the book, although this was never actually written.[48] This campaign was one of a large number of 'zaps', or attention-grabbing protests, carried out by GLF in the early 1970s. Others included disruption of Mary Whitehouse's National Festival of Light in September 1971, and public demonstrations on Fleet Street against the media and on Harley Street against psychiatrists.

Ossian had been a member of South London GLF during the 1970s. His recollections painted a picture of the group as an important social and political network, rooted in the local experience of living in Brixton:

> The Gay Liberation Front were all in what they called the villas, which was a series of erm – houses all connected to each other, which were run down, and they squatted them. And then they combined the gardens, and made a communal garden. And they even had a – like you know, hens and cockerels, and all that sort of stuff there, and a fountain and what not, it was all very magic.[49]

Matt Cook's work on the Brixton squats also emphasises the importance of these squats, on Railton Road and neighbouring Mayall Road, for the Brixton Gay Community – which included,

---

[47] GLF, *Manifesto*, 11.
[48] Robinson, *Gay Men and the Left*, 74.
[49] Interview with Ossian, b. 1954, 13 August 2018.

but was not limited to, South London GLF.[50] The significant but short-lived South London Gay Centre was based at a shop that had been squatted on 79 Railton Road, across the road from the villas, and Ossian attended his first meeting of South London GLF there in 1976. This also aligns with Christine Wall's assessment of squatting during the 1970s, which 'allowed the social and political movements of the 1970s to flourish' and 'provided the physical and spatial infrastructure' for activism.[51] Squatting was not new in the 1970s, but Cook writes that it took on new counter-cultural associations in the late 1960s and 1970s – to one contemporary commentator, squatters were 'symbols of the age'.[52] In 1976 there were an estimated 30,000 squatters in London, and for some gay men and lesbians squatting provided an opportunity for more openness and fewer restrictions than they experienced in family homes and rented accommodation.[53] Ossian himself had lived in neighbouring Herne Hill, rather than in the Railton Road squats themselves, but was still very much part of the South London milieu. He spoke at length about other communities and networks in the area that had been important to him: a wholefood co-operative at the bottom of Railton Road, a Greek shop and a Polish deli, a Jamaican-run and an Irish-run pub.[54] Railton Road was also 'littered with' alternative political groups, including the People's News Service, an anarchist bookshop, two women's centres, and the *Gay News* Defence Committee.[55] Cook's statement that both GLF and the squats could be 'all-consuming – shaping an idea of gay identity that was about much more than sexual object choice' was backed up by Ossian's vivid recollections.[56]

As well as a localised network centring on squats, wholefood shops and pubs, Ossian also discussed Gay Liberation's international links: he initially found out about GLF 'because of the New York, Stonewall riots', and had as a teenager sent off for a Gay Liberation Front Manifesto

---

[50] Matt Cook, *Queer Domesticities,* 199.
[51] Christine Wall, "Sisterhood and Squatting in the 1970s: Feminism, Housing and Urban Change in Hackney", *History Workshop Journal* 83, no. 1 (2017): 80, 93.
[52] A. Sherman, 1975, quoted in Cook, *Queer Domesticities*, 201.
[53] Cook, *Queer Domesticities*, 201.
[54] Interview with Ossian, b. 1954, 13 August 2018.
[55] Cook, *Queer Domesticities*, 202.
[56] Cook, *Queer Domesticities*, 203.

from San Francisco.[57] Robinson emphasises that GLF was influenced by 'a spectrum of international liberation movements', including the Stonewall Riots in the USA and the Black Panther Party.[58] As Robinson points out, some of these international influences, especially by black liberation movements, had a fraught relationship with the prejudices of GLF members in localised contexts. This can be seen in Ossian's recollections of the relationship between 'gay and black [in Brixton] in those days', which 'wasn't a violent one', although he added that 'the Rastas are very uptight about gays because of Haile Selassi' and acknowledged 'some [people on the gay scene] were racist'.[59] Similarly, Cook states that although 'relations between the squatters and the local Afro-Caribbean community were generally cordial', there was an assumption that 'the gay community was white', and Nadia Ellis has also argued that 1960s and 1970s discourses demarcated between 'black' and 'queer'.[60] This can also be seen in Ossian's statement about the relationship between 'gay and black', implicitly positioning the two identities as mutually exclusive. Although international influences, including the Black Panthers, did not always translate successfully to local politics, they do highlight that GLF was not just a locally-oriented community but also a wider network with shared political goals and theorisations. The political theorisations of GLF were very important to Ossian, and he discussed them at length: 'I think that's the beauty of us in the Gay Lib is that we *did* think. You know, we got things wrong, but […] we were trying'.[61] This intellectual rationale seemed to be more important to him than GLF's actions, such as zapping, which he mentioned only briefly as 'a bit bullying', and pointed out that 'they weren't doing much' by the time he joined the group in 1976.[62] This suggests that, for Ossian at least, South London GLF was a political community based more around shared ideas and texts than political actions.

I also interviewed Lisa Power (b. 1954), the author of *No Bath But Plenty of Bubbles*, an

[57] Interview with Ossian, b. 1954, 13 August 2018.
[58] Robinson, *Gay Men and the Left*, 66.
[59] Interview with Ossian, b. 1954, 13 August 2018.
[60] Cook, *Queer Domesticities*, 212; Ellis, "Black Migrants, White Queers", 897.
[61] Interview with Ossian, b. 1954, 13 August 2018.
[62] Interview with Ossian, b. 1954, 13 August 2018.

oral history of GLF.[63] Although she had not been a member of GLF herself, her research had given her an understanding of its history, and she was friends with many former members. She wrote *No Bath* because 'I always found [GLF] fascinating', and she wanted to preserve its history given the number of former GLF members who were dying of AIDS or old age. She was particularly enthusiastic about GLF's use of zaps – 'I have always had – a greater personal affinity for that kind of street activism, I mean I *love* their direct action stuff […] absolutely hilarious, the way that they – would use humour, and spectacle, and theatre'.[64] She linked this to the importance of visibility and 'coming out', which I will discuss more in Chapter Three: '[GLF] understood very early on that – being public, and – having representation, on the streets, is the most effective form of… erm, removing stigma and – and challenging prejudice'.[65]

Both Ossian and Lisa resisted the idea that GLF excluded bisexuality and multiple-gender-attraction. Ossian said that they 'didn't see that there was any binary'.[66] As mentioned above, he also stressed numerous times during our interview that 'a lot of' or 'all' of the leadership of South London GLF were bisexual, but chose to identify as gay.[67] It was not entirely clear how he was defining 'bisexual' in these statements – whether the leadership of South London GLF would have identified themselves as bisexual as well as gay, or whether he was using 'bisexual' in the way that I have used 'multiple-gender-attraction', as a description of behaviour and attraction rather than an identity category. Ossian also followed the Freudian tradition of arguing that 'everybody's bisexual […] you know, even my *dad*'.[68] The universalising of bisexuality made arguing for rights on the basis of bisexual identity more difficult, and so the apparent bisexuality of South London GLF's leadership would not necessarily have translated into affirmation of bisexuality in practice. Ossian's acknowledgment that same-sex attraction was prioritised because 'that was what was oppressed' also suggests that GLF could only accept multiple-gender-attraction by discounting its

[63] Interview with Lisa, b. 1954, 4 April 2019; Power, *No Bath.*
[64] Interview with Lisa, b. 1954, 4 April 2019.
[65] Interview with Lisa, b. 1954, 4 April 2019.
[66] Interview with Ossian, b. 1954, 13 August 2018.
[67] Interview with Ossian, b. 1954, 13 August 2018.
[68] Interview with Ossian, b. 1954, 13 August 2018.

'heterosexual element'.

Lisa emphasised that when GLF 'started out they were very much open' and 'totally understood the concept of "queer"': 'there was very much a commitment to what – then we would've called polymorphous perversity, and now we just, just call gender-fluid. And – and sexuality-fluid'.[69] This was representative of what she considered to be a widespread acceptance during the 1970s of 'polymorphous perversity', although this was portrayed more as a universal feature of sexuality rather than the developmental stage discussed in the Introduction: 'there was a general understanding that sexuality was some sort of spectrum, and that people would move along it from time to time'.[70] However, the acceptance that Lisa remembered seems to have been confined to those who were attracted to multiple genders but did not identify as bisexual. 'Bisexuality' as an identity category received a more ambiguous reception – she argued that in the 1970s identifying as bisexual was 'desperately *cool*', but also seen as a 'halfway house […] a bridge to coming out as gay'.[71] *No Bath* includes an interview with a bisexual man conducted in the early 1990s, who remembered feeling excluded from GLF when he 'started having affairs with women': 'it didn't go down very well […] There was never any open denunciations of bisexuality, but there was a frostiness'.[72] Furthermore, even the 'spectrum' of sexuality was only accepted insofar as it could still be organised into a binary of straight identity or lesbian and gay identity. When defining lesbian identity, Lisa said that during the 1970s she had 'assumed that everyone would still be primarily attracted to one sex […] if you're primarily attracted to women then you identify as lesbian, if you're primarily attracted to men you identify as straight'.[73]

In part, the differences between interviewees' memories of acceptance and the exclusionary impression created by contemporary sources could be attributed to nostalgia or a desire to create a composed, positive narrative – Ossian expressly stated that he felt GLF had been

[69] Interview with Lisa, b. 1954, 4 April 2019.
[70] Interview with Lisa, b. 1954, 4 April 2019.
[71] Interview with Lisa, b. 1954, 4 April 2019.
[72] Tim, quoted in Power, *No Bath*, 289.
[73] Interview with Lisa, b. 1954, 4 April 2019.

'wiped from history', and he saw the interview as a way to recover it.[74] However, these differences were also due to different understandings of the meanings of 'gay' and 'straight'. Ossian insisted that being 'straight' was not only about sexual identity or behaviour, but about politics: 'straight was – not just where you were putting your dick, or your […] vagina, or whatever. It was to do with the whole mentality, what you were involved in'.[75] The implication was therefore that being 'gay' required a different 'mentality' and involvement in different, progressive politics. By this assessment, the 'differences between gay people and straight people' that GLF emphasised so strongly were not primarily based on sexuality, in which bisexuality and multiple-gender-attraction occupied an awkward middle ground, but had more to do with politics. Sexual behaviour was still relevant, but it was not 'just' about this: 'straight' people were also associated with conservatism, capitalism and the maintenance of traditional gender roles, while 'gay' people challenged and subverted these roles.

However, even in this politicised binary of 'gay' and 'straight' that was distinct from but still linked to sexual behaviour, bisexuality and multiple-gender-attraction were still frequently excluded. This was because the political motives and awareness attributed to bisexuals and people attracted to multiple genders were often similar to the politics defined as 'straight' – regressive, sexist and so on. In GLF's binary division of 'gay' and 'straight', straightness was linked to conservatism and sexism through the institutions of marriage and the family. GLF's *Manifesto* expressly linked the family to gender role 'propaganda' and argued that 'the present system of work and production depends on the patriarchal family'.[76] GLF's stated aims required the 'abolition' and 'replacement' of the traditional family, which would rid society of 'the gender-role system which is at the root of our oppression', and Ossian said that GLF had sought to challenge 'the patriarchy's institutions', which he defined as marriage, the family and capitalism.[77]

---

[74] Interview with Ossian, b. 1954, 13 August 2018.
[75] Interview with Ossian, b. 1954, 13 August 2018.
[76] GLF, *Manifesto*, 8-9.
[77] GLF, *Manifesto*, 15; Interview with Ossian, b. 1954, 13 August 2018.

GLF was not alone in this criticism of the family unit. Other radical groups such as the Gay Left Collective made links between 'the family, the oppression of women and gay people, and the class structure of society', identifying the family as central to the economic and ideological needs of capitalism.[78] As Brooke argues, the rejection of the family and apparently 'straight' relationships was an ideological legacy passed on from GLF to gay Marxists.[79] Women's liberationists also linked 'women's oppression, capitalism, and the family', and Deborah Cohen has demonstrated that those on the left formed alliances with 'progressive' psychiatrists such as R.D. Laing in 'identifying the family as a particularly intimate and systematic form of oppression'.[80] Celia Hughes argues that 'critiques of the nuclear family [...] suffused New Left communities from 1968'.[81] Alliances between left-wing groups enabled liberationists to theorise their own radicalism, and justified GLF's argument that the gay liberation movement needed to be linked to struggles against sexism, capitalism and racism: 'our struggle for liberation entails challenging many of the fundamental ideas on which present society is based'.[82] However, the alliances between gay liberation, women's liberation and some 'modern' psychiatric theory were uncomfortable, and predicated on the exclusion of multiple-gender-attraction by associating it with heterosexuality. The fact that those attracted to multiple genders could be in mixed-gender, apparently 'heterosexual' marriages and have 'traditional' families meant that they were associated with the same political problems that liberationists linked to 'straightness'. This can also be seen, albeit to a lesser extent, in some of C.H.E.'s publications, such as the 1974 discussion paper for the Commission on Bisexuality, which referred to 'the bisexual contingent' as people 'who have not conformed entirely' to heterosexual conditioning.[83] The emphasis on 'entirely' suggested that bisexuals had conformed *somewhat*, but just not *entirely*, and therefore were still

---

[78] Gay Left Collective, "Collective Statement", *Gay Left,* Autumn 1975, 1-2.
[79] Brooke, *Sexual Politics*, 232.
[80] Brooke, *Sexual Politics,* 191; Deborah Cohen, *Family Secrets: The Things We Tried to Hide* (London, Penguin Books, 2014), 214.
[81] Celia Hughes, *Young Lives on the Left: Sixties Activism and the Liberation of the Self* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015), 32.
[82] Birmingham GLF, *Gay people are oppressed in numerous ways by society* (flyer, undated, c. 1975), 2, LSE: HCA/CHE/7/130.
[83] Baker, "Bisexuality" 1974 discussion paper, 4.

similar enough to straight people to provoke critique.

The associations between bisexuals and regressive 'straight' politics can also be seen in the response to Colin MacInnes's *Loving Them Both*. In addition to the racialised analysis of bisexuality discussed in the Introduction, *Loving Them Both* also included various misogynistic comments, such as the assessment that lesbians were 'gloomy', that not having children was always and inevitably a 'disaster' to a woman, and that same-sex relationships were inherently less 'emotional' and 'serious'.[84]

MacInnes's sexism was thoroughly criticised in a scathing review in *Gay News* by Roger Baker, who accused MacInnes of 'the most rampant male chauvinism'.[85] Ultimately, Baker argued, 'there builds up a distasteful portrait of a man who despises homosexuals and despises women but will cheerfully stick his cock up the arse of either before swaggering off to enjoy the missionary position and a deep meaningful relationship with "his woman"'.[86] Crucially, the review did not just criticise MacInnes as a lone individual. His 'rampant male chauvinism' was used to make a wider point about bisexual men's dominance. For example, Baker responded to MacInnes' suggestion that bisexual men would 'behave as "males"' during sex with men as well as during sex with women by arguing that this meant 'being vicious, egotistical and sadistic I suppose'.[87] He continued that 'if anyone has ever doubted the idea that the dominant male equates homosexuals with women (as objects to despise) they should read MacInnes' observations'.[88] The characterisation of the 'dominant male' could refer both to the dominant partner during sex (i.e. men who will 'usually behave as "males"'), and to socially-dominant men who hold the power in patriarchal society. The context of the discussion of sexual dominance suggests the former, but 'dominant men' were differentiated from *all* homosexuals, not just 'passive' homosexuals. This illustrates one of the ways in which gay liberationists reiterated binary views on sexuality and

---

[84] MacInnes, *Loving Them Both*, 11, 24-26.
[85] Roger Baker, "Stud Against the Wall", *Gay News,* August 1973, 13.
[86] Baker, "Stud Against the Wall", 13.
[87] Baker, "Stud Against the Wall", 13.
[88] Baker, "Stud Against the Wall", 13.

politics, by suggesting that bisexuals were equivalent or similar to heterosexuals. Both bisexual and heterosexual men were seen as having the same dominance over homosexuals and women, based in ideas of masculinist and patriarchal privilege.

The criticism of MacInnes's work in *Gay News* did not mention the racist fetishisation and stereotyping that was also present in *Loving Them Both*.[89] Other contemporaries criticised MacInnes' 'ignorance and contempt for black migrants', but this was not mentioned at all in Baker's review.[90] The fact that MacInnes's racism was not discussed as part of the critical reception of *Loving Them Both* by gay liberationists demonstrates the problems that the gay liberation movement itself had around race. As mentioned above, the ambivalent relationship between 'gay and black' that Ossian described in Brixton left little room for people who were gay *and* black. As Power notes, although the formation of GLF was inspired by the Black Panther Party's Revolutionary People's Constitutional Convention, this was often used by gay liberationists to seek legitimacy and criticise black homophobia, rather than to inspire a genuinely self-aware and self-critical approach to radical coalition-building.[91] The silences around MacInnes's racism, compared to the virulent criticism of his misogyny, also demonstrates that the criticisms of bisexual men for being politically regressive were specifically linked to their relationships with women, despite later efforts to distinguish criticism of 'straight' politics from mixed-gender relationships.

Baker was part of the radical wing of C.H.E., and sympathised with most of GLF's politics without being a member of it. This highlights how the two groups were less distinct than has been suggested, and also shows how it was the particular form of radical gay politics that led to the exclusion of bisexuals, rather than any specific group. This can also be seen in the change in

---

[89] MacInnes, *Loving Them Both*, 41-47.
[90] Ellis, "Black Migrants, White Queers", 905. Caribbean men were also aware and critical of MacInnes' attitude towards them, as one unnamed Caribbean man was quoted as saying: 'one didn't have to read Colin MacInnes' books to find out about Absolute Beginners'. Charlie Phillips and Mike Phillips, *Notting Hill in the Sixties* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1991), 73.
[91] Power, *No Bath*, 5.

C.H.E.'s approach to bisexuality and multiple-gender-attraction over the course of the 1970s. As C.H.E. began to embrace more radical politics in the mid-1970s, it began to exclude multiple-gender-attraction from its political analyses, as I will discuss below.

The exclusion of bisexuality and multiple-gender-attraction by gay liberationists was not always or primarily the product of deliberate and wilful erasure – more often, it was as a result of ignorance or a focus on different, more exclusively 'homosexual' concerns. However, this ignorance and sense of priorities was a direct result of GLF's political theorising, not independent of it. Radical gay liberation politics relied on a binary distinction between 'gay' and 'straight'. The capacity to be attracted to someone of a different gender was linked to the capacity for men to exploit women, and a sense that those attracted to multiple genders would eventually and inevitably get married, have a family, and thus maintain conservative and capitalist ideals. This was everything that gay liberationists defined themselves against. In some cases, this led to bisexuals, especially bisexual men, being castigated as chauvinistic. At other times some people attracted to multiple genders were accommodated, provided that they were primarily interested in the same gender and defined themselves as gay or lesbian. More frequently, GLF did not acknowledge bisexuality or multiple-gender-attraction at all.

The Campaign for Homosexual Equality

Echoing his argument that the label of 'straight' could refer more to politics than to sexual behaviour or identity, Ossian described C.H.E. scathingly: 'They were *fake*. They were *straight*'.[92] Lisa similarly criticised C.H.E.'s 'bureaucracy', 'nit-picking' and attempt to 'ape heterosexual society'.[93] This aligns with Brooke's assessment of C.H.E. as 'traditional', seeking 'respectability and authority', and resistant to changing the political structure.[94] However, although C.H.E.'s approach to political engagement was certainly much more hesitant than GLF's, this was not

[92] Interview with Ossian, b. 1954, 13 August 2018.
[93] Interview with Lisa, b. 1954, 4 April 2019.
[94] Brooke, *Sexual Politics*, 231.

necessarily as straightforward as these analyses suggest.

C.H.E. was the largest lesbian and gay organisation in the country in the 1970s, with a membership of around 4,000.[95] This was both an effect and a cause of its 'big tent' approach to politics that sought to incorporate a wide range of members' needs and perspectives. Gwen had been closely involved with C.H.E. during the 1970s, including serving as Chair.[96] She remembered a wide range of methods, including writing a submission to the Criminal Law Revision Committee, visiting schools, appearing on television and working alongside GLF: 'trying to go out there and just […] promote gay rights, really, and […] combat discrimination and prejudice'.[97] This 'big tent' approach obviously had advantages and disadvantages for C.H.E., and many of its publications during the 1970s were attempting to work through these tensions – for example, between those who wanted to 'demonstrate that homosexuals are capable of conducting their lives responsibly', and a more radical wing influenced by GLF.[98] By the late 1970s, C.H.E. had adopted more liberationist politics, but this was a subtle shift over the course of the decade, rather than a radical departure.

As discussed above, the Campaign had its roots in efforts during the late 1960s to provide spaces for homosexuals to socialise openly – far from apolitical at the time, although in the 1970s C.H.E.'s social function was often portrayed as antithetical to being an 'effective campaigning organisation'.[99] In an introductory flyer, C.H.E. committed itself to law reform and providing social facilities, but also wrote of the need to challenge 'medical, psychiatric and religious attitudes' – the same targets of much of GLF's activism.[100] Gwen had been part of a more radical wing within C.H.E., and stated that, for her, the differences between C.H.E. and GLF were in part due to location: 'GLF was mainly in London […] whereas we, C.H.E., had branches all around the country'.[101]

---

[95] Robinson, *Gay Men and the Left*, 79; Brooke, *Sexual Politics*, 231.
[96] Interview with Gwen, b. 1951, 9 October 2018.
[97] Interview with Gwen, b. 1951, 9 October 2018.
[98] Martin Stafford, "Does Morality Matter?", *C.H.E. Bulletin*, June 1971, 3.
[99] Bernard Greaves, "C.H.E. and Political Action", *C.H.E. Bulletin*, September 1972, 1.
[100] C.H.E., *Introducing C.H.E.* (Introductory flyer, undated, c. 1975), 1-2, LSE: HCA/CHE/10/11.
[101] Interview with Gwen, b. 1951, 9 October 2018.

Although she admitted that for many in C.H.E., GLF were 'just too far out and too left-wing and too […] gender-bending', they had been able to form a fragile alliance in certain situations.[102] There were also consistent attempts by C.H.E. to link 'the politics of homosexuality with other areas', particularly Labour and trade union politics – its founder and later President, Allan Horsfall, was a socialist and former Labour councillor.[103]

C.H.E. was therefore less 'apologetic and cowardly' than its critics suggested.[104] Rather than being a consistently 'moderate' or 'homophile' opponent to GLF's radicalism, it included a wide range of perspectives from conservative to liberationist. The key difference between GLF and C.H.E.'s political theorising in the early 1970s was that C.H.E. did not construct a binary division between 'gay' and 'straight'. In its introductory flyer, C.H.E. clearly stated: 'homosexuality is not something apart from heterosexuality – rather it is part of a spectrum of sexual orientation'.[105] This focus on a 'spectrum' meant that, initially at least, C.H.E. was able to incorporate bisexuality and multiple-gender-attraction into its analysis: 'Many millions are bisexual […] we want a society in which people of all sexual orientations, heterosexual, bisexual or homosexual, have the same freedom'.[106] The organisation FRIEND, the counselling and befriending arm of C.H.E., also repeatedly referenced bisexuality, stating that it existed to help isolated 'homosexual and bisexual women and men', and emphasising that its counsellors were 'mostly themselves homosexual or bisexual' and 'fully accept homosexuality and bisexuality'.[107] This was not only surface-level naming – there was a discussion paper on bisexuality presented at C.H.E.'s Malvern Conference in 1974; a discussion paper, discussion group and report at the Sheffield Conference in 1975; and several references to multiple-gender-attraction in other texts. C.H.E.'s wide-ranging approach to politics was also reflected in its attitude to bisexuality. Just as C.H.E. took a 'big tent' approach to politics, attempting to incorporate a wide range of perspectives

---

[102] Interview with Gwen, b. 1951, 9 October 2018.
[103] Robinson, *Gay Men and the Left*, 79.
[104] Robinson, *Gay Men and the Left,* 79.
[105] C.H.E., *Introducing C.H.E.*, 1.
[106] C.H.E., *Introducing C.H.E.*, 1.
[107] FRIEND, *Who Needs a Friend* (introductory flyer, undated, before 1979), 1-3, LSE: HCA/CHE/10/11.

and functions, so too did it attempt to replicate nearly every possible understanding of bisexuality in the first half of the 1970s.

C.H.E.'s 1974 'Discussion Paper on Bisexuality' was written by Roger Baker, who had also reviewed *Loving Them Both* for *Gay News*. It featured almost every possible construction of bisexuality, though these were often contradictory. For example, Baker echoed the conceptualisation of bisexuality as a 'synthesis' of heterosexual and homosexual by referring to its 'homosexual component'.[108] In the same paragraph, however, he stated that 'to define and attempt to examine bisexuals in terms of 40 (gay) : 60 (straight) or 10:90 would clearly be tedious and not very useful'.[109] The paper argued that there was 'a great deal of truth' in the Freudian argument that 'our original sex drive is essentially bisexual', but this belief was also criticised as a 'fantasy-consolation' for self-hating homosexuals, which Baker dismissed by reiterating his own homosexuality: 'many homosexuals (like myself) could not possibly find any sort of continuing satisfaction in a heterosexual relationship'.[110] Finally, the paper suggested that bisexuality 'subverts [a] neat system and will not be contained', suggesting that bisexuality was politically radical, but also described the 'bisexual contingent' as a group of people who had 'not conformed entirely' to heterosexual conditioning – implying that they had conformed at least *somewhat*, if not *entirely*.[111] The following year's discussion paper had a similarly contradictory approach. For example, it argued that bisexuality was regarded as a 'threat' by 'more conservative people', suggesting a radical or subversive potential, but also that 'some people, rather than coming out openly as gay, hide themselves behind a mask of bisexuality', which implied that bisexuality was treated with less opprobrium than 'coming out openly as gay'.[112] These contradictory images of bisexuality indicate a lack of clarity about what, if anything, C.H.E.'s approach to bisexuality and attraction to multiple genders should be.

---

[108] Baker, "Bisexuality" 1974 discussion paper, 1.
[109] Baker, "Bisexuality" 1974 discussion paper, 1.
[110] Baker, "Bisexuality" 1974 discussion paper, 3-4, 7.
[111] Baker, "Bisexuality" 1974 discussion paper, 2, 4.
[112] C.H.E., "Bisexuality" 1975 discussion paper, 12.

C.H.E.'s mixed approach to bisexuality was also echoed in Gwen's experiences. For much of the 1970s she had lived with a male partner, but also had relationships with women. When I asked about the responses to this in C.H.E., she said that C.H.E. had 'some – sort of mixed feelings about bisexuality'.[113] She didn't receive any hostility – 'but I *bet* there was *lots* of flak behind my back'.[114] The impression generally seems to have been tolerant but not actively welcoming – Gwen said that her 'gay credentials' were 'pretty sound, and established, and I don't think anybody really… minded, but perhaps there were people who said "do you know, she actually lives with a man", you know'.[115] Gwen's own feelings about her identity were ambivalent, both during the 1970s and 1980s and at the time of our interview:

> *Interviewer:* Did you use the term bisexual […] to describe yourself?
>
> *Gwen:* I *did*, but – [*sighs*] You see this has always been a bit of a problem for me, because – I've always been in absolutely no doubt about my bisexuality. But – as a – as a sexual *identity*, it's problematic […] it's a confused - confus*ing* identity, for people. It can be. Erm... so as a sexual identity, I sort of - I identified as *gay*, or lesbian. Or, more accurately, as not straight.[116]

She also felt more able to 'come out' as bisexual later on, after she felt she had earned acceptance by fighting 'for the gay cause'.[117] The fact that she felt the need to 'fight for the gay cause' in order to establish her 'gay credentials' reinforces the sense that C.H.E.'s acceptance of multiple-gender-attraction was conditional and needed to be earned, rather than an inherently inclusive understanding of sexual community.

Although C.H.E. was the largest, it was by no means the only 'homophile' organisation in England and Wales during this period. The North-Western group from which C.H.E. originated had been envisaged in the mid-1960s as a northern off-shoot of the HLRS, although it quickly became more radical and independent.[118] The HLRS itself had been formed in 1958 to pressure the government to implement the Wolfenden Report's recommendations. Its mission was so

---

[113] Interview with Gwen, b. 1951, 9 October 2018.
[114] Interview with Gwen, b. 1951, 9 October 2018.
[115] Interview with Gwen, b. 1951, 9 October 2018.
[116] Interview with Gwen, b. 1951, 9 October 2018.
[117] Interview with Gwen, b. 1951, 9 October 2018.
[118] Scott-Presland, *Amiable Warriors,* 120.

specific that achieving law reform in 1967 caused a crisis of purpose, and although it was renamed the Sexual Law Reform Society (SLRS) in 1970 with a broader focus, it was unable to command the same influence in the 1970s.[119] The Albany Trust had been founded as a counselling and support wing of the HLRS, although it soon began to host talks and discussion groups as well. It was still active in the 1970s, although often derided 'as a remnant of a past, more apologetic age'.[120] In the 1950s and 1960s, homophile groups in Britain articulated their claims to respectability through the image of homophile 'inverts' who had no choice. This depended in part on the marginalisation of 'perverts', primarily working-class men attracted to multiple genders, whose potential to 'choose' the gender of their sexual partners threatened this respectable narrative.[121] By the 1970s, however, this had changed. Not only did C.H.E. and FRIEND discuss bisexuality at length, but the Albany Trust also discussed the prospect of forming a group and producing a paper on bisexuality.[122] Its organising secretary, Arlo Tatum, was himself bisexual. The project was abandoned, which Tatum suggested was in part because the Trustees thought that his sexuality made him 'exaggerate the importance' of research on bisexuality, but the fact that it was proposed and considered is itself significant.[123] This change in homophile attitudes towards multiple-gender-attraction and bisexuality demonstrates that the 1970s were a specific historical moment – not only for the changing relationship between 'homophile' and 'liberationist' groups, but also in terms of the potential for bisexuality and multiple-gender-attraction to become part of lesbian and gay politics.

At the same time, mindful of Joe Moran's caution not to view the 1970s as a 'unified entity with a distinctive character', it should also be noted that there was change over the period.[124] C.H.E.'s politics were subject to constant interrogation throughout the 1970s, and by the second

---

[119] Scott-Presland, *Amiable Warriors*, 163.
[120] Robinson, *Gay Men and the Left*, 79.
[121] Matt Houlbrook, *Queer London,* 196-197.
[122] Letter from Arlo Tatum to Richard Hauser, 1 December 1976, LSE: HCA/ALBANY TRUST/7/46.
[123] Arlo Tatum to Richard Hauser, December 1976.
[124] Joe Moran, "'Stand Up and Be Counted': Hughie Green, the 1970s, and Popular Memory", *History Workshop Journal* 70, no. 1 (2010): 194.

half of the decade it had become more radical and less likely to discuss bisexuality and attraction to multiple genders.

In the early 1970s, debates within C.H.E. tended to focus on whether C.H.E.'s political, campaigning functions should be emphasised, or whether it should focus on social activities. In 1972, Bernard Greaves's article for *C.H.E. Bulletin*, 'C.H.E. and political action', argued that C.H.E.'s 'social' role should be secondary to changing society and campaigning for 'emancipation'.[125] He argued that C.H.E. was 'not an effective campaigning organisation at present', but that it should be, 'for if C.H.E. is not a relevant political force for the emancipation of homosexuals it will fail and fall apart'.[126] In 1973, C.H.E. and the SMG both left the National Federation of Homophile Organisations (NFHO), which had been founded in 1971 to co-ordinate activities between over twenty moderate gay and lesbian groups, citing amongst other reasons problems with the NFHO's 'ponderous structures'.[127] At the 1974 Conference a lengthy paper, written by Gwen and others, again juxtaposed C.H.E.'s campaigning and social functions: 'whereas C.H.E. set out to be a campaigning organisation […] it has in fact succeeded in setting up a series of social groups'.[128] As a result of this paper, a 'C.H.E. Activists Network' was set up to act as a specific campaigning wing. The influence of GLF was apparent in the network's organisation 'on non-bureaucratic lines', its requirement for members to 'be prepared to "come out"', and its aim to 'explore the roots of oppression and evolve a radical philosophy' – quite different to the assessments of C.H.E. as prioritising privacy and 'eschew[ing] any analysis of oppression'.[129] Although the Activists Network disbanded in 1975, after problems involving its administrative structure and the lack of qualifications required for someone to become an activist, there was a general acceptance that

---

[125] Greaves, "Political Action", 1.
[126] Greaves, "Political Action", 1.
[127] Anonymous, "C.H.E. withdraw from NFHO", *Gay News,* July 1973, 5; Anonymous, "SMG Also Quits the National Federation", *Gay News,* July 1973, 7.
[128] Peter Naughton, Chris Johnson, Liz Stanley and Glenys Parry, "C.H.E. Structure or – What Future for C.H.E.?" (Report to the Commission on Structure presented at C.H.E. Conference, Malvern, 25 May 1974), 1, LSE: HCA/CHE/8/7.
[129] Naughton et al, "C.H.E. Structure", 4-5; Brooke, *Sexual Politics*, 231.

C.H.E. should take a more active role in campaigning for gay rights.[130]

Debates from the mid-1970s onwards therefore focussed less on whether C.H.E. should be 'campaigning', and more on whether it should have a specific political alignment. In November 1974, C.H.E.'s Chair at the time, Barrie Kenyon, argued that C.H.E. should remain politically neutral, implicitly rejecting GLF's politicised understanding of 'gayness': 'C.H.E. has no distinct philosophy of gayness, save the vital need for equality. And this is sensible'.[131] As with other arguments about C.H.E.'s politicisation, this was justified by referring to a particular vision of the group's past: 'Traditionally and justly, C.H.E. has always been "all things to all men and women"'.[132] Nearly three years later, C.H.E.'s Information Officer, Nigel Hart, wrote an article for *Gay News* re-stating the argument for a depoliticised C.H.E., against the general move leftwards.[133] He argued that C.H.E. had 'immense advantages' from being 'a single-cause organisation, a focus for people who believe in gay rights, whatever else they may believe in', and that it was not C.H.E.'s 'business to involve itself in any cause which is not strictly relevant to gay rights'.[134]

However, these opinion pieces were ineffective against the overall trend towards a more radical form of politics. Despite the arguments of more conservative C.H.E. members, in August 1977 the Conference voted to give C.H.E. a mandate to 'oppose racism and fascism', and in May 1978 C.H.E. became affiliated with the Anti-Nazi League.[135] This affiliation was a clear policy-based example of a more general trend towards the political left in C.H.E. from the mid-1970s, which continued for the rest of the decade: in July 1979 the renamed *C.H.E. Broadsheet* published an article entitled 'The Prospects Under Toryism', which argued that the Tories wanted 'a society based on self-interest, competitiveness and materialism'.[136] The article continued that gay people

---

[130] Barrie Kenyon and Christopher Bowden-Smith, "C.H.E. Activists", *C.H.E. Annual Report 1975* (Manchester: C.H.E. Executive, 1975), 7.
[131] Barrie Kenyon, "Understanding and Misunderstanding C.H.E.", *C.H.E. Bulletin,* November 1974, 1.
[132] Kenyon, "Understanding and Misunderstanding", 1.
[133] Nigel Hart, "One Cause – Or Many?", *Gay News*, May 1977, 15.
[134] Hart, "One Cause", 15.
[135] Anonymous, "C.H.E. joins ANTI-NAZI LEAGUE", *C.H.E. Broadsheet*, May 1978, 1.
[136] Ted McFadyen, "The Prospects Under Toryism", *C.H.E. Broadsheet*, July 1979, 3.

needed to resist this through 'commitment and solidarity' – although there was still a cautious editorial disclaimer that these views were those of the article's author, not C.H.E. policy.[137] At the 1979/1980 conference, C.H.E.'s former Chair Michael Steed even suggested a period of civil disobedience.[138] C.H.E. also became more 'liberationist' in ways that went beyond policy decisions. Its newsletter became increasingly informal and playful in style over the course of the 1970s, until it became 'hard to distinguish […] from any liberational or pop culture publication'.[139]

In part, these changes were due to changing membership of the organisation as a whole and its Executive Committee – conservatives resigned or were not re-elected, and were replaced by younger and more radical voices.[140] Robinson suggests that this was also influenced by the break-up of GLF in the mid-1970s: 'With the Front no longer a visible force, reformists felt less need to distance themselves from radical actions and approaches'.[141] The change over time was also reflective of the 'highly charged' political context of the 1970s and the strength of far-right groups such as the National Front, which made many rights- and liberties-based groups more radical in response – the fact that a key indicator of C.H.E.'s move leftwards was its affiliation to the Anti-Nazi League is evidence of this.[142] As C.H.E. became more oriented towards liberationist politics, there was also a general trend away from discussion of bisexuality. 1974 and 1975 were the only conferences at which there was discussion of bisexuality, and after this point there was no nationally-based discussion of bisexuality in C.H.E.'s newsletter, at the conferences or in the Annual Reports. C.H.E.'s 'big tent' approach to politics in the early 1970s had initially led it to incorporate all possible approaches to bisexuality and multiple-gender-attraction. However, as it became more radical in the mid-1970s it, like GLF beforehand, began to exclude bisexuality and

---

[137] McFadyen, "Toryism", 3.
[138] Robinson, *Gay Men and the Left*, 124.
[139] Robinson, *Gay Men and the Left*, 124.
[140] Martin Stafford, who wrote that homosexuals should 'conduct their lives responsibly' resigned from the Executive Committee in 1973. Glenys Parry became Chair in 1975. In 1975, the number of new members of C.H.E. nearly equalled the number of renewed memberships: Robinson, *Gay Men and the Left*, 124.
[141] Robinson, *Gay Men and the Left*, 123.
[142] Chris Moores, *Civil Liberties and Human Rights in Twentieth-Century Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 216-217.

multiple-gender-attraction from its analysis.

The position of bisexuality and multiple-gender-attraction in gay liberation groups during the 1970s was therefore a complex one. Clearly, as demonstrated by my interviewees, many people attracted to multiple genders had been members of and involved with these groups. However, their relationship with them was uneasy. Multiple-gender-attraction could sometimes be accepted, but generally only if an individual identified as gay and prioritised same-gender attraction. Bisexuals were linked to heterosexuality and criticised for having regressive 'straight' politics, such as upholding gender roles and perpetuating sexist stereotypes. At the beginning of the period, these politics were generally espoused by GLF. Over the course of the 1970s, however, as GLF broke down on the national level, other gay liberation groups – such as Gay Left and C.H.E. – began to dismiss or criticise bisexuals as politically regressive as well.

Lesbian Communities

Analyses of the relationships between bisexuality and lesbian and gay communities often focus on the 'challenge' posed by bisexuality to lesbian politics in particular. Paula C. Rust, for example, argues that bisexual inclusion was a *particularly* contentious issue for lesbians because it had implications for the boundaries of lesbian communities and politics.[143] She suggests that the formation of lesbian feminist politics out of (primarily heterosexual) feminism and the (primarily male) gay liberation movement meant that lesbian communities were more likely to be defensive over their boundaries than gay male communities. Hemmings devotes a chapter of *Bisexual Spaces* to the relationship between bisexuals and lesbians in Northampton, Massachusetts ('Lesbianville'), where she argues lesbian discourses often distinguished between bisexuality and lesbianism 'through oppositional use of the terms *political* and *sexual*', and positioned 'bisexual women as sexual rather than political, and as embodying heterosexual privilege'.[144] The relationship between bisexuals and gay men in San Francisco, meanwhile, is

[143] Rust, *Bisexuality and Lesbian Politics*, 235.
[144] Hemmings, *Bisexual Spaces*, 73, 54.

subsumed within a chapter discussing the National Bisexual Conference.[145] The anthology *Bisexual Horizons: Politics, Histories, Lives* contains five chapters that explicitly focus on bisexual women, lesbianism and feminism, compared to two that focus on bisexual men's politics (with a particular emphasis on AIDS).[146]

Many of my interviewees also reflected this focus on the tensions between bisexual and lesbian communities. For example, when Alison (b. 1967) talked about the hostility she received from lesbian and gay people, she was primarily focussed on lesbians: '[biphobia], particularly in the 80s, it was very much motivated by second-wave feminist attitudes? […] I was basically told that I should be making the political choice to be a lesbian'.[147] Louise talked about responses to her work at a lesbian magazine – from criticisms of her as an individual ('it was really wrong that they were, you know, giving a job on a lesbian magazine to a bisexual woman who was with a man') to 'backlash' and 'hate mail' received in response to an article she wrote on bisexuality ('it was basically [saying] "there's nowhere for lesbians to go to – escape from, you know, men"').[148]

Of course, this is partly a reflection of the genders of the speakers – female interviewees were more likely to come into contact with lesbian communities. The authors of the above-mentioned literature are also all women. However, Ian (b. 1962) also referred to lesbian feminism, commenting that the 'lesbian sex wars stuff' made bisexual groups more cautious about 'gatekeeping', in order to define themselves against the perceived flaws of lesbian feminist politics.[149] The emphasis on the tense relationship between bisexuals and lesbians was also a function of a different temporal context – in the 1980s, bisexual communities were becoming

---

[145] Hemmings, *Bisexual Spaces*, 53-98, 145-198.
[146] Off Pink Collective, *Bisexual Horizons*. Chapters that explicitly focus on women, feminism and lesbianism are: Valerie Barlow, "Bisexuality and Feminism: One Black Woman's Perspective", 38-40; Susan M. Sturgis, "Bisexual Feminism: Challenging the Splits", 41-44; Meg Clarion, "The hasbians", 122-126; Frances Murphy, "Conversations with a bi woman", 154-157; Zaidi Parr, "Feminist Bisexuals in the UK – caught between a rock and a hard place?", 274-280. The chapters focussing on male bisexual politics are: Guy Chapman, "Roots of a male bisexual nature", 62-69; Mark Davis, Gary Dowsett and Ullo Klemmer, "On the beat: A report on the Bisexually Active Men's Outreach project", 188-199.
[147] Interview with Alison (pseudonym), b. 1967, 5 October 2018.
[148] Interview with Louise, b. 1966, 22 July 2018.
[149] Interview with Ian, b. 1962, 7 May 2019.

more coherent and assertive, and lesbian feminism had only relatively recently become more organised and vocal.[150] This meant that these conflicts attracted more publicity than the silences and exclusions of individuals by the gay liberation movement in the 1970s. As the first half of this chapter has argued, gay liberationists also excluded bisexuality and multiple-gender-attraction, but the nature of and rationale for this exclusion differed. Lesbian feminism constructed bisexuality as particularly 'sexual' (in a way that was mutually exclusive with 'political'), and it was also seen as threatening the incursion of men into women-only spaces.

Six interviewees had been involved in lesbian feminist communities during the 1980s. Elsa (b. 1951), Judith (b. 1954) and Lisa all identified as lesbian at the time of our interview, and had experienced attraction to and relationships with men in the past.[151] Gwen primarily spoke about C.H.E. in her interview, but also recalled attending women's movement meetings in the 1970s and 1980s.[152] As discussed above, she described being 'in absolutely no doubt about my bisexuality', but finding it 'problematic' as a sexual identity and thus identifying primarily as gay or lesbian.[153] Other interviewees – Vera (b. 1960) and Louise – had identified as lesbian during the 1980s, but identified as bisexual at the time of our interview.[154]

Lesbian feminism grew out of both gay liberation and women's liberation. Many lesbians were frustrated at the heterosexual focus of much of the women's liberation movement, which often portrayed lesbianism as a 'lavender herring' distracting from the struggle for women's rights.[155] The gay liberation movement, meanwhile, was heavily male-dominated – as discussed above, women left GLF in frustration in 1972 and C.H.E. in 1977. Liz Stanley, the women's

---

[150] London Bisexual Group was founded in 1981. Lesbian feminism could be seen as beginning with the first Gay Women's Conference in April 1974, and the adoption of the 'lesbian' demand by the women's liberation movement in the same year.
[151] Interview with Elsa (pseudonym), b. 1951, 29 January 2019; Interview with Judith (pseudonym), b. 1954, 11 October 2018; Interview with Lisa, b. 1954, 4 April 2019.
[152] Interview with Gwen, b. 1951, 9 October 2018.
[153] Interview with Gwen, b. 1951, 9 October 2018.
[154] Interview with Vera (pseudonym), b. 1960, 26 October 2018; Interview with Louise, b. 1966, 22 July 2018.
[155] Jeffreys, *The Lesbian Revolution*, 22.

organiser for C.H.E. between 1972 and 1976, wrote in 1982 that gay men in the movement did not just ignore women, but were actively hostile and misogynist.[156] A gay women's group was founded by the women who left GLF in February 1972, and the first Gay Women's Conference took place in April 1974. By the mid-1970s, these groups were generally describing themselves as for 'lesbians' rather than 'gay women', to emphasise their independence from gay liberation organisations. 'Lesbian feminists' could be used to refer simply to lesbians who were also feminists, but was also seen by some, such as the revolutionary feminist Sheila Jeffreys, as denoting a specific type of feminist politics: '[lesbian feminists] saw their lesbianism as fundamental to their feminism, rather than incidental, and were involved in challenging heterosexuality as an oppressive institution'.[157]

Judith had been involved in several groups connected to the women's movement, which she said gave her 'what I needed in terms of feeling, er… properly part of a community again'.[158] These included fortnightly consciousness-raising groups, the helpline Lesbian Line, and a social event for lesbians known simply as Lesbian Drinks.[159] She also taught Women's Studies evening classes. Judith argued that the form of these groups was particular to the location, a Midlands market town, and to the 1980s as a decade: 'There was a very strong… radical or progressive strand of activity in [the town] then, which… erm… didn't survive, really… [That] would be one of the things I'd want to know – what happened? What happened to all of that activity? What happened to all of us?'.[160] These groups were explicitly connected to other progressive causes and organisations, especially environmental and peace politics. Numerous activist groups produced a collective 'Activist Calendar' for the area, and Judith recalled 'a very strong sense of… working

[156] Liz Stanley, "Male Needs: The Problems and Problems of Working with Gay Men", in *On The Problem of Men: Two Feminist Conferences,* ed. Scarlet Friedman and Elizabeth Sarah (London: Women's Press, 1982), 199.
[157] Jeffreys, *The Lesbian Revolution*, 8.
[158] Interview with Judith (pseudonym), b. 1954, 11 October 2018.
[159] Interview with Judith (pseudonym), b. 1954, 11 October 2018.
[160] Interview with Judith (pseudonym), b. 1954, 11 October 2018.

together as allies'.[161]

Other interviewees had also been involved in feminist environmentalist and peace movement groups. Elsa became involved in feminism through the peace movement, rather than the other way around: 'my politics then sort of expanded into – not just peace politics, but women's politics, and the glorious mixture of the two that Greenham was'.[162] Vera had been involved in publishing a spiritual feminist magazine, and connected feminism, lesbianism, the peace movement and the spirituality of the Goddess movement: 'it's like your sexuality, and your politics, and your spirituality, *all* lined up together', although she also acknowledged that as she had got older she had realised 'life's not that neat, is it?'.[163] As Ruth Lindley argues, spiritual feminists 'did not use spirituality as merely a language through which to discuss political ('real') issues, but as the starting point of their radical feminist critique'.[164] Again, specific locations – in this case, another Midlands town, and a city in the East Midlands – were very important in Vera's experience: 'the '80s were a very fertile time in [the city] […] there were lots of collective type stuff, there were – you know, wholefood shops, the printing collective, […] the veggie food collective […] lots and lots of women – women's bands, and things'.[165]

In general, the lesbian communities that interviewees spoke about were less coherent than the gay liberation organisations, even the comparatively anarchic GLF. Interviewees spoke about being involved in a general 'community' and engaging with a wide range of activities. Jeffreys discusses 'women's culture' that was 'informed by the theory and politics of lesbian feminism' – not just produced by lesbian feminists, but arising from 'a distinctly lesbian perspective, a view of the world that started from a critique of heterosexuality as a political institution and envisaged and created a new world for women'.[166] This included feminist

[161] Interview with Judith (pseudonym), b. 1954, 11 October 2018.
[162] Interview with Elsa (pseudonym), b. 1951, 29 January 2019.
[163] Interview with Vera (pseudonym), b. 1960, 26 October 2018.
[164] Ruth Lindley, "'The Personal Is Political Is Spiritual': Feminism and Religion in Modern Britain", PhD Thesis (University of Birmingham, 2019), 4.
[165] Interview with Vera (pseudonym), b. 1960, 26 October 2018.
[166] Jeffreys, *The Lesbian Revolution*, 9.

literature, bookstores and printing presses, lesbian-only squats, women's music and theatre, and women's discos.[167] These were often not linked to specific groups, although many of the same people were involved in organising them. As such, unlike in the first half of this chapter, I will focus on the themes that arose in interview discussions about these communities and politics, rather than specific organisations in themselves.

Bisexuality and multiple-gender-attraction were fraught topics for lesbian feminist politics firstly because they upset the idea of lesbianism as a political choice. Rust argues that many of the political arguments made by lesbian feminists during the 1970s and 1980s 'relied implicitly on the assumption that lesbianism is a possible choice for all women'.[168] Women who were attracted to multiple genders but identified as lesbian could be incorporated within lesbian feminism, but women who continued to identify as bisexual were seen as seeking male approval and thus politically regressive. Secondly, bisexual women were seen as allowing the incursion of men, either literally through their relationships with them, or symbolically through their perceived attention to or prioritisation of men. This can be seen in the lesbian backlash to Louise's article on bisexuality, in the comment that 'there's nowhere for lesbians to go to – escape from, you know, men'.[169] Lesbians who read the article were not *literally* confronted with men, because Louise was a woman writing for a women's magazine, but the discussion of bisexuality was seen as bringing attention to men and their desires. Bisexual men were also perceived as threatening to lesbians in spaces such as the London Lesbian and Gay Centre. Both of these themes – lesbianism as a political choice, and the incursion of men – will be discussed below. At the same time, it is important to avoid uncritically re-iterating the supposedly binary division between 'exclusionary' lesbians on the one hand, and 'inclusive' bisexuals on the other, particularly in relation to topics such as the 'lesbian sex wars' over sadomasochism (SM) and

[167] Lucy Delap, "Feminist Bookshops, Reading Cultures and the Women's Liberation Movement in Great Britain, c. 1974 – 2000", *History Workshop Journal* 81 (2016): 171-196; Wall, "Sisterhood and Squatting", 79-97.
[168] Rust, *Bisexuality and Lesbian Politics*, 163.
[169] Interview with Louise, b. 1966, 22 July 2018.

pornography. Just as there were differences and divisions within the gay liberation movement on the inclusion of bisexuality and multiple-gender-attraction, so too were there differences amongst lesbian feminists.

Lesbian Politics and Political Lesbianism

Jeffreys, writing in 1999, set out the argument that bisexuality 'depoliticised' sexual identity.[170] She had been part of Leeds Revolutionary Feminists, who wrote *Love Your Enemy?*, a pamphlet setting out the argument for political lesbianism by arguing that all feminists 'can and should be political lesbians'.[171] This belief was essential to conceptualising lesbianism as a challenge to the patriarchy, as Rust argues: 'lesbianism could be such a tool [for feminism] only if women were able to choose lesbianism freely in response to men's patriarchal behaviour, and men would only change their behaviour if they believed that women were capable of responding'.[172] However, if lesbianism was a form of political protest because it represented 'a refusal to love men against all the pressures of the male-dominant, man-loving culture', acknowledgement and acceptance of attraction to multiple genders was 'a form of co-operation with male supremacy'.[173] This was one reason why bisexuality was such a fierce area of debate amongst feminists in the 1970s and especially the 1980s. When lesbianism was viewed as a positive political choice, women identifying as bisexual was inevitably seen as politically regressive, because it meant that they were choosing to continue interacting with men. This was a factor in many women, including some of my interviewees, identifying as lesbian rather than bisexual.

Elsa had identified as heterosexual early in her life, which had involved marriage to a man,

---

[170] Sheila Jeffreys, "Bisexual Politics: A Superior Form of Feminism?", *Women's Studies International Forum* 22, no. 3 (1999): 276.
[171] Leeds Revolutionary Feminists, *Love Your Enemy? The debate between heterosexual feminism and political lesbianism* (London: Onlywomen Press, 1981), 5.
[172] Rust, *Bisexuality and Lesbian Politics*, 163.
[173] Jeffreys, "Bisexual Politics", 283; Rust, *Bisexuality and Lesbian Politics*, 185.

and then identified as lesbian from around the mid-1980s.[174] She said that 'it didn't occur to me' to identify as bisexual, without offering further explanation, but also said that other women might have described her as bisexual, 'because I'd been heterosexual'.[175] Although she didn't explicitly link bisexual politics to her identifying as lesbian, she commented more generally on how bisexuality 'wasn't really approved of', was viewed by lesbians as 'really like – supping with the devil', and that bisexual women were believed to be 'supported by and approved by the patriarchy'.[176] Elsa's language here was reminiscent of *Love Your Enemy?*, and although she distanced herself from these views with passive language – 'it was viewed as', 'wasn't really approved of' – it seems likely that they would have had an impact on her identity, even if an unconscious one.

Elsa did explicitly distance herself from what she described as the 'lesbian thought police' and the 'mainstream thinking at the time', which argued that 'all men were bastards'.[177] She described her long-term relationship with a man as having been 'very happy, very strong, very loving' and said that 'nobody wanted to hear that my one was alright'.[178] I will discuss lesbian interviewees' often positive recollections of male former partners in greater detail in Chapter Four. However, despite these positive experiences, Elsa emphasised that when she first began having relationships with women 'it wasn't just about sex, it was about politics and the whole… *life*, basically'.[179] While her relationship with a man was a positive experience, then, it was not political in the same way as her relationships with women. She also reflected on the significance of the specific 1980s context in relation to this, saying that her relationship with her male partner 'didn't quite work out, although maybe it could've done, in a different place, or a […] different time'.[180]

---

[174] Interview with Elsa (pseudonym), b. 1951, 29 January 2019.
[175] Interview with Elsa (pseudonym), b. 1951, 29 January 2019.
[176] Interview with Elsa (pseudonym), b. 1951, 29 January 2019.
[177] Interview with Elsa (pseudonym), b. 1951, 29 January 2019.
[178] Interview with Elsa (pseudonym), b. 1951, 29 January 2019.
[179] Interview with Elsa (pseudonym), b. 1951, 29 January 2019.
[180] Interview with Elsa (pseudonym), b. 1951, 29 January 2019.

Elsa's recollections about lesbian and bisexual identity are strikingly similar to one of the Hall-Carpenter interviewees, Beryl (b. 1947).[181] In a similar way to Elsa's brief statement that identifying as bisexual 'didn't occur to' her, Beryl said that 'I never have thought bisexuality was an option, really, I don't think'.[182] Similarly to Elsa's positive reflections on her male former partner, Beryl said that she had been 'getting on […] very well, most of the time, with the man that I lived with' and she 'found that very hard to reconcile' with her feminist politics and involvement in Women's Aid groups. This could therefore suggest that bisexuality was being characterised as an insufficiently political identity, or one separate from feminist politics, in such a way that it provided no useful means of reconciling these politics with a relationship with a man. Beryl also distanced herself from the 'mainstream' lesbian perspective during the 1980s, in that she initially resisted coming out as a lesbian because she felt too much external pressure to do so: 'it just seemed like *everybody* was coming out, and that was the thing to do'.[183] Unlike Elsa, who explicitly identified as a lesbian at the time of our interview in 2019, Beryl still seemed hesitant when asked by the interviewer to describe her sexuality – 'in what way?' – but generally seemed to accept the interviewer's assertion of her lesbianism.

Of course, some women attracted to multiple genders identified as lesbian for other reasons, not always directly connected to lesbian feminism. As discussed above, Gwen focussed more on the gay liberation movement, and identified as gay, lesbian or 'not straight' because she saw bisexuality as potentially 'a weaselly way of kind of not being in the gay struggle'.[184] She was critical of political lesbians, who she considered to be 'straight women pretending to be lesbians': 'there was a big debate about whether it was - almost like, to be a true feminist you had to be a lesbian […] And I *really* didn't agree with that […] There's nothing worse than straight women

[181] Beryl Foster, b. 1947, interviewed by MF, 17 May 1991. The British Library: HCA Oral History Project, C456/108.
[182] Beryl Foster, b. 1947, interviewed by MF, 17 May 1991. The British Library: HCA Oral History Project, C456/108.
[183] Beryl Foster, b. 1947, interviewed by MF, 17 May 1991. The British Library: HCA Oral History Project, C456/108.
[184] Interview with Gwen, b. 1951, 9 October 2018.

pretending to be lesbians for a feminist reason, is there?'[185] Other women also echoed this critique of political lesbians as 'straight women pretending to be lesbians'. Alison (who identified as bisexual, both at the time of our interview and during the 1980s) described political lesbians as 'not *actually* attracted to women' and '*nominally* part of the L and G community at that time – [but they] actually weren't. And yet they were telling me I wasn't valid'.[186] Lisa, who identified as lesbian, said that she 'actually ended up feeling like I was a second-class lesbian [compared to political lesbians], because *I* was doing it out of lust'.[187] She explained her lesbian identity on the basis of her belief in a binary of 'primary' attraction – she was primarily attracted to women, and so identified as lesbian.[188]

Other interviewees, however, did explicitly link their lesbian identity to feminist politics. Judith said that she identified as lesbian 'coz I'm a feminist. I mean – that's why'.[189] She also said that she 'never called [herself] bisexual, because… of the politics surrounding it, really […] Because I'm a feminist'.[190] She differentiated between 'sexual behaviour', 'sexual identity' and 'political affiliation', and argued that although her sexual behaviour had been 'bisexual', she was lesbian '*much* more politically – as a political act, than as a sexual identity'.[191] This is reminiscent of Jeffreys' argument that 'the lesbianism of lesbian feminism […] is not seen simply or even necessarily as sexual acts' but rather as 'a form of political resistance to male dominance'.[192] When I asked for more detail about Judith's thoughts on bisexual politics, however, she became more vague: 'it's not that I'm less keen on it [bisexual politics]. I'm probably just a product of my time'.[193] Although she denied being 'less keen on' bisexual politics, her rejection of bisexual identity because of 'the politics surrounding it' and her juxtaposition of being a feminist with being

[185] Interview with Gwen, b. 1951, 9 October 2018.
[186] Interview with Alison (pseudonym), b. 1967, 5 October 2018.
[187] Interview with Lisa, b. 1954, 4 April 2019.
[188] Interview with Lisa, b. 1954, 4 April 2019.
[189] Interview with Judith (pseudonym), b. 1954, 11 October 2018.
[190] Interview with Judith (pseudonym), b. 1954, 11 October 2018.
[191] Interview with Judith (pseudonym), b. 1954, 11 October 2018.
[192] Jeffreys, "Bisexual Politics", 275.
[193] Interview with Judith (pseudonym), b. 1954, 11 October 2018.

bisexual suggests that Judith did, in fact, consider there to be a dichotomy between bisexual identity and (lesbian) feminist politics. Her denial of this was probably more to do with discomposure about being asked a direct question on the subject, especially given that I was interviewing her for a project focussed on 'bisexuality and multiple-gender-attraction', and she may therefore have believed that I wanted to hear uncritically positive reflections on bisexuality.

Judith's argument that her views on lesbian feminism are 'a product of [her] time' warrants closer attention. The women I interviewed who identified as lesbian at the time of our interview were generally of a similar age – born between 1951 and 1954. Other women, such as Louise and Vera, who were both born in the 1960s, had identified as lesbian during the 1980s but identified as bisexual from around 2000.[194] It does therefore appear that the continuation of lesbian identity into the present, amongst women attracted to multiple genders, can be linked to a specific sub-generation. This may be because they were more deeply involved in and thus more influenced by debates around political lesbianism and lesbian feminism in the late 1970s and early 1980s, or because they were *less* involved in sexual politics and activism by the time bisexuality became more visible and widely-discussed in the late 1980s and 1990s. An exception to this generational trend is Carmen (b. 1949), who despite being the oldest of my interviewees identified as pansexual.[195] However, she had come to this through counter-cultural and sexual freedom groups, after previously identifying as straight, and had rejected the lesbian feminists she described as 'orthodykes' in the 1970s and 1980s. In general, the interviewees who had been involved in lesbian feminism support Judith's argument that her lesbian feminist identity was a 'product' of a specific time. I will return to the issue of generational differences in greater detail in Chapter Five.

Some of the Hall-Carpenter interviewees were also part of the same sub-generation of these interviewees, born in the 1940s and early 1950s, although of course they were interviewed

[194] Interview with Louise, b. 1966, 22 July 2018; Interview with Vera (pseudonym), b. 1960, 26 October 2018.
[195] Interview with Carmen (pseudonym), b. 1949, 31 May 2019.

around three decades before I conducted my own interviews. In addition to Beryl, who was born in 1947 and stated that she didn't think bisexuality was 'an option', other Hall-Carpenter interviewees also rejected bisexuality, often for political reasons. For example, Liz (b. 1951) said that she was in a good relationship with a male partner when she became attracted to women, but 'I didn't define myself as bisexual […] that didn't make any sense to me, it wasn't about that… it was about that I had this very very… strong relationship with this particular man'.[196] Although she did not explicitly state why bisexuality 'didn't make any sense', at another point in the interview she also spoke about coming to reject relationships with men due to her research into sexual abuse:

> It made me… even more angry. About the forms that women's oppression takes, on an individual, interpersonal level. And it certainly made… it much much more difficult, and in the end impossible, for [my partner] and I to sustain a sexual relationship […] I just found… it impossible to reconcile, erm… everything that I knew, and connecting that up, much more, to an analysis of… heterosexuality as an institution, and how it currently functions. To feel, erm… comfortable, in that [relationship].[197]

Liz therefore rejected heterosexuality, and relationships with men in general, due to a lesbian feminist analysis of sexual politics. Sophie (b. 1957) also talked about the links between sex with men and sexual abuse, and argued that her involvement in feminism meant that she eventually found it difficult to distinguish 'ordinary heterosexual sex' from rape.[198] Like other interviewees, she emphasised that this was not specific to her individual experiences with men – 'I don't think I was coerced very much at all' – but a general political analysis of mixed-gender relationships.[199] The comments made by Liz and Sophie about the politics of mixed-gender relationships aligned with the political lesbian analysis in *Love Your Enemy?*: '[Penetration's] function and effect is the punishment and control of women. It is not just rape which serves this function […] every act of

---

[196] Liz Kelly, b. 1951, interviewed by MF, 16 March 1991, The British Library: HCA Oral History Project, C456/105.
[197] Liz Kelly, b. 1951. Interviewed by MF, 16 March 1991, The British Library: HCA Oral History Project, C456/105.
[198] Sophie Laws, b. 1957, interviewed by MF, 8 March 1990 / 8 June 1990 / 6 October 1990, The British Library: HCA Oral History Project, C456/81.
[199] Sophie Laws, b. 1957, interviewed by MF, 8 March 1990 / 8 June 1990 / 6 October 1990, The British Library: HCA Oral History Project, C456/81.

penetration for a woman is an invasion which undermines her confidence and saps her strength'.[200] Although Judith did not refer specifically to these arguments, her references to the feminist politics of lesbianism do seem to align with the more detailed points made by Liz and Sophie, who were born at similar times. It does therefore appear that this specific link between feminist politics and lesbian identity as a conscious choice was a 'product of [a specific] time', a sub-generation of women who were in their late twenties and thirties during the 1980s and engaged in debates about lesbian feminism.

On the other hand, Judith also said that she identified as a lesbian for political reasons even when she was *currently* in a relationship with a man: 'I'm a lesbian who happens to be sleeping with a man at the moment'.[201] A similar argument was made by the Hall-Carpenter interviewee Diane (b. 1941), who said that her husband 'knew that I was a lesbian, or – or was… had had relationships with women as well'.[202] The interviewer seemed confused by this, and asked her about the 'process of changing [her] sexuality' after the break-up of her marriage, but Diane was very insistent: 'It wasn't so much changing it, as sort of activating it […] I felt I was already a lesbian, so didn't have to – come out so much from that point of view'.[203] This understanding of lesbian identity could therefore still incorporate relationships with men. These definitions of lesbianism – a woman who was attracted to other women, *not* necessarily to the exclusion of men – were directly at odds with the definition of 'political lesbianism' asserted in *Love Your Enemy*?: 'a political lesbian is a woman-identified woman who does not fuck men. It does not mean compulsory sexual activity with women'.[204] Sophie, who argued in her Hall-Carpenter interview that she found it difficult to distinguish 'ordinary heterosexual sex' from rape, also disagreed with *Love Your Enemy*, because she thought the attitude of Leeds

[200] Leeds Revolutionary Feminists, *Love Your Enemy?*, 6.
[201] Interview with Judith (pseudonym), b. 1954, 11 October 2018.
[202] Diane Langford, b. 1941, interviewed by MF, 10 May 1991, The British Library: HCA Oral History Project, C456/107.
[203] Diane Langford, b. 1941, interviewed by MF, 10 May 1991, The British Library: HCA Oral History Project, C456/107.
[204] Leeds Revolutionary Feminists, *Love Your Enemy?*, 5.

Revolutionary Feminists patronisingly portrayed heterosexual women as 'either stupid or masochistic'.[205] She seemed conflicted on the issue of political lesbianism itself – on the one hand, she wrote that 'I absolutely reject the idea that heterosexual feminists' political work is undermined simply by their sleeping with men *as such*', but also broadly agreed with the argument that there were 'obviously ways in which women's relationships with men damage themselves and other women'.[206] Ultimately, her disagreement seems more focussed on the approach taken by Leeds Revolutionary Feminists, and she argued that leaving relationships with men should be a decision made by these women, without being 'dictated' to.[207]

Even amongst women who identified as lesbian for political reasons, therefore, there were still differences about what this meant, and the politics and strategy behind it. Judith and Diane, and potentially others, emphasised identifying as lesbian as a political act of solidarity with other women, which could still incorporate relationships with men and multiple-gender-attraction, even as it characterised bisexual identity as less 'political' or politically regressive. In contrast, the authors of *Love Your Enemy?* prioritised the rejection and exclusion of men. This position, linked to a desire for women-only spaces, affected women attracted to multiple genders whether they identified as bisexual or not.

Women-Only Spaces and Phallic Envoys

Attraction to multiple genders was also perceived as a threat to lesbianism insofar as it enabled the incursion of men into women-only or lesbian-only spaces. Men attracted to multiple genders were perceived as a risk in a similar way to straight men, and considerably more so than gay men, because they could harass lesbians with their potentially desiring male gaze. Bisexual women were a threat because of 'their relationship, or potential relationship, to men […] The bisexual woman's male lover lurks in the shadows; she is his phallic envoy into uncharted

[205] Sophie Laws, quoted in Leeds Revolutionary Feminists, *Love Your Enemy?*, 13.
[206] Sophie Laws, quoted in Leeds Revolutionary Feminists, *Love Your Enemy?*, 13.
[207] Sophie Laws, quoted in Leeds Revolutionary Feminists, *Love Your Enemy?*, 13.

territory'.[208]

Many of my interviewees recalled abuse or suspicion from lesbians on the basis of their 'potential relationship to men'. One of Louise's lesbian friends was upset when Louise 'came out' as bisexual because she was concerned about Louise bringing her male partner to events: 'she said "well I'm… you know, I really value my – my lesbian friendships […] I don't really want to socialise with straight couples"'.[209] On a more extreme level, Alison was even punched by the new girlfriend of an ex-partner, who told her that 'you should make a choice, leave men behind, you're *tainted* because you've slept with men'.[210]

Perhaps the single clearest example of bisexual exclusion from lesbian and gay communities during the 1980s was the decision by London Lesbian and Gay Centre to refuse to allow bisexual groups to meet there, in March 1985.[211] The Centre had been set up in 1984, funded by a grant from the Greater London Council.[212] Kate was an out bisexual volunteer at the Centre at the time, and described it as a 'really *fantastic* resource, spaces for – everything, spaces for organisations and groups, and – meetings, and a bar café, it was really, really fantastic'.[213] The decision to ban bisexual groups was reported by *Bi-Monthly* to have been influenced by lesbians 'who expressed the view that bisexual men were likely to harass lesbians in the Centre'.[214] Kate summed up the ban as being 'on the grounds that – lesbians should be able to feel safe from men looking at them in a – or thinking about them, I suppose, in a sexual way'.[215] SM groups were also banned, for 'similar' reasons – I will discuss the links between bisexuality and SM in greater detail below.[216] Although the Centre itself was not seen as a women-only or lesbian-only space, the ban

---

[208] Hemmings, *Bisexual Spaces*, 78.
[209] Interview with Louise, b. 1966, 22 July 2018.
[210] Interview with Alison, b. 1967, 5 October 2018.
[211] Smith, "Banned", 2-3.
[212] Stephen Brooke, "Space, Emotions and the Everyday: The Affective Ecology of 1980s London", *Twentieth Century British History* 28, no. 1 (2017): 110-142.
[213] Interview with Kate, b. 1960, 31 August 2019.
[214] Smith, "Banned", 2.
[215] Interview with Kate, b. 1960, 31 August 2019.
[216] Smith, "Banned", 2-3.

and the reasoning behind it suggest that it was seen as a space where lesbians should be able to be free from the potential desire of men. Bisexual men were seen as particularly threatening in this regard, and bisexual women were excluded by association.

The ban from London Lesbian and Gay Centre also highlights the tensions between the development of an *independent* bisexual community, a bisexual community that was a *sub-section* of a wider lesbian and gay community, and individual bisexuals. A letter in response to the ban, written on behalf of *Bi-Monthly*, London Bisexual Group, Edinburgh Bisexual Group and the Bisexual Women's Group, explicitly sought bisexual inclusion as part of the lesbian and gay community: 'we understood the Centre was established to be a Community Centre and we are part of that Community'.[217] The ban was also of bisexual organisations, not individuals who were attracted to multiple genders. This was highlighted in *Bi-Monthly* as a reason why the ban was flawed: 'it was pointed out that it was illogical to allow individual bisexuals to use the Centre but not bisexual groups'.[218] Kate spoke in her interview of a sense of betrayal that her work for the London Lesbian and Gay Centre, and the lesbian and gay community more broadly, was going unacknowledged:

> It made no sense at all, coz they didn't ban individual bisexuals, they only banned groups […] we're working for this centre, we're *doing* stuff, we're *contributing* […] Part of the argument, er, against bisexuals at the time, was, well they're just freeloaders, you know, they don't *do* anything to advance lesbian and gay liberation […] And we're there modelling – being bisexual and very active politically and, you know, donating our time as a volunteer, and all that. Made no difference. They still banned the bisexual groups.[219]

It was also 'implied' at a meeting with the Management Committee of the Centre that the Radical Lesbian / Gay-Identified Bisexual Network would still be allowed to meet there, 'because of the nature of its title' – that is, the fact that they 'identified' as or with lesbians and gays.[220] The Edinburgh Bisexual Group was also not banned, presumably because they were unlikely to meet in the London centre. As mentioned above, bisexual groups had been allowed to use the

---

[217] Smith, "Banned", 3.
[218] Anonymous, "London Lesbian and Gay Centre bisexuals still banned", *Bi-Monthly*, June 1985, 3.
[219] Interview with Kate, b. 1960, 31 August 2019.
[220] Anonymous, "But confusion remains about who is banned", *Bi-Monthly*, June 1985, 3.

Edinburgh Lesbian and Gay Centre as their meeting place from its inception.

The ban was clearly distressing to many, particularly bisexuals who had been involved with lesbian and gay activism. The way the ban was understood – as lesbians within the Centre rejecting the threatening sexual gaze of bisexual men, and bisexual women's associations with men – also has significant implications for the histories of bisexual and lesbian communities and politics. However, it should not be overstated as a complete rejection of bisexuals from a wider lesbian and gay community. The ban was voted down by members of the Centre in June 1985, after less than three months, and seems to have encountered criticism from most quarters: *Bi Monthly* reported that the Lesbian and Gay Pride Week Committee had threatened not to stage any events at the Centre in protest at the ban, and *Gay News* described it as 'a fiasco' and 'if nothing else […] one of the greatest PR debacles the gay movement has yet seen'.[221]

The London Lesbian and Gay Centre was clearly not a women-only space, although it did have a women-only floor. Lisa recalled that she 'wasn't allowed on the women's floor' because she was 'too controversial', although it is unclear whether this was ever made official.[222] Gay men were not perceived as threatening by the lesbians in the Centre, nor was desire for women in general, but bisexual men were associated with straight men in that their specifically male desire for women was seen as potential harassment.

Many specifically women-only or lesbian-only spaces proliferated in the 1980s, and interviewees expressed a wide range of feelings about them. Judith emphasised that she was 'not a separatist, I never have been', but she had been interested in 'creating a women-only space' through Lesbian Drinks.[223] This statement highlights how the distinctions between 'women-only' and 'lesbian-only' were often elided in lesbian communities. Louise also reflected on the 'porous […] boundaries between feminism and more kind of *lesbian* subculture' as a positive feature – 'we

---

[221] Anonymous, "Fiasco of Gay Centre Ban", *The New Gay News*, March 1985, 3; Anonymous, "London Lesbian & Gay Centre", *The New Gay News*, March 1985, 14.
[222] Interview with Lisa, b. 1954, 4 April 2019.
[223] Interview with Judith (pseudonym), b. 1954, 11 October 2018.

talked about *women*'s clubs, we didn't say *lesbian* clubs'.[224] For Louise, especially as a young adult, this helped them to appear an 'unthreatening environment' where 'there were lots of reasons to want to go, even if you weren't, you know, looking to pull'.[225] The description of groups or events as 'women's' therefore implied that they were less sexualised, and could possibly incorporate ambiguity about one's sexual identity, in a way that she found freeing.

On the other hand, Vera was more negative about women-only spaces, and argued that they had pressured her and other women to identify as lesbians: 'the further I got into, sort of, women-only stuff, there was more and more pressure to *not* be, bi, and to be a lesbian […] nobody would be *horrible* to you, if you were straight, or bi, but you weren't really… you didn't really *belong*, the way you belonged if you were a lesbian'.[226] Her more critical recollections were affected by her sense that she had been using women-only activism as a way of 'repressing' her attraction to men: 'I just – *didn't* spend any time with any men at all! [*laughs*] […] you know, [I focussed on] all kinds of stuff which was women-only, or lesbian-only'.[227] It was only after spending some time at the mixed-gender 'Queer Pagan Camp', an experience which she described as 'magical', 'amazing' and 'probably one of the best weeks I've ever spent anywhere' that she began to question her lesbian identity and 'come to terms with the fact that […] I seemed to be attracted to some blokes'.[228] Her efforts to explore multiple-gender-attraction were then further curtailed by the fact that she lived in a lesbian-only housing co-operative at the time, and so 'coming out' as bisexual might lead to losing her home.

It should be noted that the communities and spaces that Louise and Vera were talking about were quite different. Louise was focussing on social spaces, women's club nights and discos, in contrast to Vera's focus on women-only peace camps and activist groups. The differences in their perspectives could therefore be seen more as a reflection of the differences between

[224] Interview with Louise, b. 1966, 22 July 2018.
[225] Interview with Louise, b. 1966, 22 July 2018.
[226] Interview with Vera (pseudonym), b. 1960, 26 October 2018.
[227] Interview with Vera (pseudonym), b. 1960, 26 October 2018.
[228] Interview with Vera (pseudonym), b. 1960, 26 October 2018.

primarily 'social' networks and more organised, explicitly political, groups. This interpretation is reinforced by Louise's discussion of more organised girls' youth groups. In those instances, the association between lesbianism and a group being solely for women or girls was more alienating, and Louise said that this contributed to bisexuality not feeling like a 'tenable identity' for many years:

> I didn't think of [bisexuality] as tenable for *me*? […] there was a lot of kind of girls' work, you know, youth work, girls' work it was called, like specific work that was being done with young women […] It was like "Lesbians, Lesbians, Lesbians" [*laughs slightly*]. You know? And... there was no... there was no resources. There was nothing. Nobody was running a group for bi girls.[229]

The major divide amongst lesbian feminists in the 1980s was what many interviewees referred to as the 'lesbian sex wars', focussed primarily on SM and pornography. These began in the US, influenced by the rival magazines *Off Our Backs* and *On Our Backs*, and in the UK were mostly focussed in London, although cities such as Leeds also witnessed bitter divisions.[230] Critics of SM saw it as the glorification of violence against women, and linked leather clothing and whips to Nazism and slavery.[231] One interviewee, Vera, said her opinion in the 1980s had been 'that kind of standard feminist line that goes "ooh. That doesn't - that looks horrible, and unequal, and - is not a good idea"'.[232] Pornography, meanwhile, was seen as commodifying women's bodies for male gratification – 'pornography depends for its continued existence on the rape and prostitution of women' – and its detractors often highlighted examples of extremely violent and racialised imagery to demonstrate this.[233] Other issues related to women-only spaces also became mixed up in the 'sex wars' – lesbian feminists who were hostile to pornography and SM were often also assumed to be 'political' lesbians, and opposed to the inclusion of bisexuals and trans people as well. This led to a binary construction of the debates, both in written sources and amongst my

---

[229] Interview with Louise, b. 1966, 22 July 2018.
[230] Jeffreys, *The Lesbian Revolution*, 116.
[231] Jeffreys, *The Lesbian Revolution*, 121.
[232] Interview with Vera (pseudonym), b. 1960, 26 October 2018.
[233] Andrea Dworkin, "Pornography and Male Supremacy", in *Letters from a War Zone: Writings 1976 – 1989* (New York, NY: Lawrence Hill Books, 1993), 230.

interviewees, which mapped fairly consistently onto the 'political' / 'sexual' binary. On the one hand, there were lesbian feminists who were opposed to SM, pornography, the inclusion of bisexuals and trans people, and often supported a view that women should make the political choice to identify as lesbians; and on the other hand, there were 'sex-positive' women who did not think that feminists necessarily needed to identify as lesbians, and who accepted SM, pornography, bisexuals and trans people.

In Britain, the 'lesbian sex wars' involved fierce debates and splits within organisations – for example, Louise's support for SM feminists caused a rift between her and others on the editorial team of *Shocking Pink* magazine, which led to her resignation, and she recalled that 'no group or institution was left unscathed, basically'.[234] There were also hostile protests and 'invasions' of women into groups or events that they disagreed with. Louise spoke about the 'infamous' group of women who 'smashed their way in' to Chain Reactions, a lesbian SM club night, 'with crowbars and ski masks […] it was bizarre at the time, it seems even more bizarre now, it's just like – hang on, you're complaining about violence against women, but you're violently... you know, invading this – space'.[235] In turn, Judith criticised the SM lesbians who turned up at a lesbian disco 'in a lot of leathers with chains and – whips […] it was absolutely *dire*, coz lots of women got very *upset*, and erm – they wouldn't *stop*'.[236]

Most of my interviewees were critical of the anti-SM and anti-pornography position. Both Lisa and Louise criticised it as 'ridiculous', although both clarified that they were not personally involved in SM.[237] Louise thought that the 'insistence that [SM] was bad and wrong [*laughs*], tantamount to *evil*, erm... was... kind of exaggerated', and was actually '*glamorising*' SM further.[238] Lisa portrayed it as overly-sensitive and humourless:

> They thought I was a known S and M-er, because I'd been *condemned* […] because I'd turned up to the opening of the London Lesbian and Gay Centre in a pair of leather boots

[234] Interview with Louise, b. 1966, 22 July 2018.
[235] Interview with Louise, b. 1966, 22 July 2018.
[236] Interview with Judith (pseudonym), b. 1954, 11 October 2018.
[237] Interview with Louise, b. 1966, 22 July 2018; Interview with Lisa, b. 1954, 4 April 2019.
[238] Interview with Louise, b. 1966, 22 July 2018.

> with a riding crop stuck down them, *as a joke*. And I was there with my very good mate at the time, who'd turned up in a leather jacket and she'd borrowed a man's muir cap. And we were condemned for wearing "Nazi regalia and instruments of torture"![239]

Lisa linked this perspective to 'a really strong desire to purify the club […] which was very bizarre', and Louise linked it to the political lesbian 'anxieties' around penetration.[240] In the US context, too, Hemmings argues that 'the same women who were vocal in the antipornography/SM arguments in 1989 spoke most publicly in favour of maintaining the [Northampton] Pride March as Lesbian and Gay', thus linking their hostility to bisexuality to a broader desire for a 'homogeneous' lesbian community.[241] In the UK, this perspective was further reinforced by the fact that London Lesbian and Gay Centre banned SM groups at the same time as bisexual groups, as both were seen as threatening to lesbians in the Centre, and the fact that there was a lot of bisexual people involved in the SM scene, as I will discuss in the next chapter. Vera, who characterised her opinion in the 1980s as 'that standard feminist line' of hostility to SM, said that her views on this changed at the same time as she 'came out' as bisexual around 2000: 'my politics changed, my feminism changed, erm, my attitudes towards all kinds of things changed, it was quite a big upheave-y time'.[242]

Another issue linked to this was the inclusion of trans women, especially in 'women-only' spaces. Women who were particularly concerned about penetrative sex sapping women's strength were also more likely to view trans women as male. If they were particularly threatened by bisexual women symbolically allowing the 'incursion' of men into women's spaces, they were also likely to be hostile to the perceived 'incursion' of trans women into these same spaces. When Vera came out as bisexual after identifying as lesbian, she changed her opinions not just on SM but also trans inclusion. While previously she said that she had been 'part of the very, kind of reactive, erm… set of beliefs… you know, that – like, sort of trans exclusionary stuff you see now

---

[239] Interview with Lisa, b. 1954, 4 April 2019.
[240] Interview with Lisa, b. 1954, 4 April 2019; Interview with Louise, b. 1966, 22 July 2018.
[241] Hemmings, *Bisexual Spaces*, 70.
[242] Interview with Vera (pseudonym), b. 1960, 26 October 2018.

[…] I – I wasn't supportive of trans women at all'.[243] Identifying as bisexual also led her to become more inclusive of trans women and SM, suggesting that the 'standard feminist line', which was implied to be the *lesbian* feminist line, was opposed to these. Alison also echoed this in her argument that bisexual and trans people were 'allies' who were more able to understand one another's perspective: 'L and G people, erm… I think the way they treat bi and trans issues is very much the same'.[244] I will return to this topic in Chapter Five, on Popular Memory, because many interviewees linked the 'lesbian sex wars' to debates about trans inclusion and the Gender Recognition Act that were particularly active in the late 2010s. For now, it suffices to highlight that the 'lesbian sex wars' were not solely about pornography and SM, but also incorporated broader anxieties about 'women-only spaces' and the lesbian community, which were often couched in the language of the 'political' / 'sexual' binary.

However, interviewees' discussions of their own identities and beliefs did not always align with this strict binary. Lisa, as discussed above, 'just didn't like censorship' and thus disagreed with the stance that many lesbians took in relation to SM and pornography, but she also identified as lesbian partly for political and feminist reasons.[245] Judith despaired of the 'dire' behaviour of SM feminists, but in relation to pornography she was more hesitant, and said that she 'want[ed] to be sex-positive without being pornographic'.[246] While Vera linked her changed politics around trans women to her changed politics around SM, she also referred to the American radical feminists Catharine MacKinnon and Andrea Dworkin, who were strongly anti-pornography but also 'rock-solid trans inclusive'.[247] Furthermore, bisexuals also had mixed responses to SM. There were articles in *Bi-Monthly* that were critical of SM ('SM is based on dominance / submission and humiliation. These are the very practices in society that express misogyny') as well as defensive of it ('S/M could even be seen to symbolise the new ideal: ie –

[243] Interview with Vera (pseudonym), b. 1960, 26 October 2018.
[244] Interview with Alison (pseudonym), b. 1967, 5 October 2018.
[245] Interview with Lisa, b. 1954, 4 April 2019.
[246] Interview with Judith (pseudonym), b. 1954, 11 October 2018.
[247] Interview with Vera (pseudonym), b. 1960, 26 October 2018.

balanced power out in the open in safe environments between people who trusted and loved each other').[248] Carmen, who described herself as pansexual and had never identified as lesbian, had been involved in making experimental pornography, but was hostile towards both trans women and 'orthodyke' lesbian feminists.[249] Ian recalled discussions at many bisexual conferences during the 1980s about 'stopping having penetrative sex', which was partly related to concerns about AIDS but also influenced by lesbian feminist critiques of penetration.[250] The assumption that lesbian feminist communities were uniformly hostile towards bisexual women, trans women, SM and pornography was therefore not always accurate, and the 'lesbian sex wars' did not divide lesbian communities into a clear and consistent binary.

The role of place was also an important factor in divides amongst lesbian feminists. Lisa emphasised that there was much more division between lesbian feminists in London, where she lived during the 1980s, than she had encountered in Lancaster in the 1970s.[251] She attributed this in part to the different time, but also to the different size of the community – in London during the 1980s the lesbian community was increasingly large and confident and therefore, she argued, more exclusionary: 'there starts to be higher – or different, expectations – and you don't accept everybody into one big warm fold'.[252] Louise also stated that her experiences were particular to London, and that the experiences of a friend who grew up in a small town were much less consciously linked to feminism, and much more 'gritty' and 'scary'.[253]

Bisexuality and multiple-gender-attraction were therefore excluded by lesbian politics in the 1980s. Women who continued to identify as bisexual were seen as politically regressive, because they were rejecting political lesbian feminism in favour of male approval and 'sleeping with the enemy'. In contrast to lesbianism, which was 'political', bisexuality was seen as primarily

---

[248] Liz Verran, "Why SM is Unacceptable", *Bi-Monthly*, March 1984, 2; Pink Dandelion, "Pro-SM", *Bi-Monthly,* February 1985, 16-17.
[249] Interview with Carmen (pseudonym), b. 1949, 31 May 2019.
[250] Interview with Ian, b. 1962, 7 May 2019.
[251] Interview with Lisa, b. 1954, 4 April 2019.
[252] Interview with Lisa, b. 1954, 4 April 2019.
[253] Interview with Louise, b. 1966, July 2018.

'sexual', and often linked to pornography, SM, and the damaging incursion of men into women-only spaces. Women who were attracted to multiple genders but did not identify as bisexual could sometimes be included, but sometimes had to consign relationships with men to the past in order to be included on the basis of a lesbian identity. Although some individual lesbians were tolerant of bisexuality during this time, lesbian *politics* could not allow for bisexuality to also be political. As Rust concludes: 'the one implication that follows consistently from almost all of lesbians' arguments is the implication that bisexuality per se, regardless of how it is defined, has no politics […] lesbian politics have been constructed at the expense of the possibility of a bisexual politics'.[254]

Conclusion

Bisexuality in the 1970s and 1980s was framed as apolitical or, more frequently, actively politically regressive. This was due to the political problem that bisexuality posed, firstly to gay liberation politics with its binary of 'gay' and 'straight', and secondly to the gender essentialism and desexualisation of lesbianism particular to certain strands of lesbian feminism. Men attracted to multiple genders were often particularly criticised for holding on to patriarchal privilege, while bisexual women were threatening through their continued association with men.

It is important to distinguish between people who identified as bisexual, and those who identified otherwise but were attracted to more than one gender. In the 1970s gay liberation movement, people who were attracted to multiple genders but identified as gay could be accepted and incorporated into a gay/straight binary. Amongst 1980s political lesbians, however, women who identified as lesbian but continued to have sex with men were a source of great tension and division – although that did not mean that they stopped doing so, as Judith and Lisa demonstrate.

In relation to change over time, C.H.E.'s increasing radicalism over the course of the 1970s meant that bisexuality was less likely to be included by gay organisations in the second half of the

[254] Rust, *Bisexuality and Lesbian Politics*, 200.

decade. During the 1980s, bisexuals began to form independent groups that were separate from gay liberation organisations. This separation was, in turn, rigidly enforced by gay and lesbian groups – most notably, the London Lesbian and Gay Centre banning bisexual groups in 1985. This was again on the basis of bisexuals' proximity to straightness, and more specifically the threat that hyper-sexualised male desire posed to women.

In the next chapter, I focus on the development and nature of these bisexual groups and politics. Often, they sought to define themselves against the gay and lesbian groups that had excluded them. This had some successes – for example, bisexual politics was more able to embrace non-normative relationships and sexual behaviours, such as non-monogamy and SM. However, these appeals to inclusivity and diversity were often vague and unable to support more coherent organisation. Some interviewees questioned whether a bisexual community existed at all, even as late as the 2010s.

Chapter Two

Independence

In the 1980s bisexuals gradually began to form their own, independent communities and develop a politics of bisexuality that argued for its radical potential. By the end of the decade there was a range of bisexual organisations, publications and conferences across Britain. In this, British bisexual communities appear to align with Amanda Udis-Keller's assessment of the bisexual movement in the US, which she asserts began in 1980 and 'truly' took off in the late 1980s, whereas prior to that point 'bisexuals were not doing much, at least not in an organised way'.[1] However, in this chapter I argue that the reality was less straightforward than Udis-Keller's developmental narrative suggests. A lack of clarity in bisexual politics contributed to organisations that were often incoherent and contradictory, and did not represent or appeal to a large number of people attracted to multiple genders, including many of my interviewees.

The existence and nature of a 'bisexual community' or communities was still subject to scepticism and debate, even at the time I was conducting my interviews in the late 2010s. In May 2019 *Gay Star News* published an article asking 'why bisexual people have yet to form a community'.[2] This claim – that bisexual people are either unable or unwilling to form 'their own' community – has been repeatedly reiterated as a criticism of bisexuals. It can be linked to the idea that bisexuality was apolitical or politically regressive, and therefore potentially individualist, as well as the suggestion that bisexuals were interlopers or 'freeloaders' in lesbian and gay communities.[3] Unsurprisingly, then, the *Gay Star News* article prompted a swift defensive backlash by many bisexual organisations and commentators: 'There definitely is a bisexual

---

[1] Amanda Udis-Keller, "Identity / Politics: A History of the Bisexual Movement", in *Bisexual Politics: Theories, Queries and Visions*, ed. Naomi Tucker, 2nd ed. (New York, NY: Routledge, 2013), 27, 22.
[2] Lewis Oakley, "Is this the reason why bisexual people have yet to form a community?", *Gay Star News*, 2 May 2019, https://www.gaystarnews.com/article/is-this-the-reason-why-bisexual-people-have-yet-to-form-a-community/. The suggested 'reason' was bisexual people's greater likelihood of having relationships with non-bisexuals.
[3] Interview with Kate, b. 1960, 31 August 2019.

community – and it's changing lives', according to the writer and activist Lois Shearing.[4]

However, scepticism about bisexual communities was not just reserved for lesbian and gay critics of bisexuality. The *Gay Star News* article was written by a bisexual man, the paper's 'bisexual correspondent'. US bisexual activist Robyn Ochs said in the early 1990s that 'I don't think there will or should be a separate bi community […] so many of us are in the gay community'.[5] Some of my interviewees also privately questioned whether there was a bisexual community even in the twenty-first century. Curtis (b. 1958) said 'I don't think there *is* a bisexual community', and Gwen (b. 1951) said 'I never found one'.[6] This chapter argues that the persistent recurrence of debates about an independent bisexual community is not just a sign of the persistent dismissal of bisexuality and multiple-gender-attraction, but also indicates that bisexual organisations and politics, despite their historical and contemporary emphasis on inclusivity, were limited in scope and often difficult to access. This is an uncomfortable fact for many theorists of bisexuality, usually themselves bisexual, who too often uncritically repeat an idea of bisexual politics as 'a politics of diversity' and argue that appreciation of diversity could be the 'unique contribution of the bisexual community to other communities'.[7] I argue that although their experiences of exclusion led the founders of bisexual organisations to prize ideas of inclusivity, this often failed to materialise in practice.

The first section of this chapter discusses bisexual 'communities', primarily through organisations such as London Bisexual Group, founded in 1981, and Edinburgh Bisexual Group, founded in 1984; although there were also groups in Brighton (1985), Manchester (1986) and

---

[4] Lois Shearing, "There definitely is a bi community – and it's changing lives", Medium.com, 4 May 2019, https://medium.com/@lois.shearing/there-definitely-is-a-bi-community-and-its-changing-lives-23324d415cdd.

[5] Robyn Ochs, quoted in Elizabeth Reba Weise, "The Bisexual Community: Viable Reality or Revolutionary Pipe Dream?", in *Bisexual Horizons: Politics, Histories, Lives,* ed. The Off Pink Collective (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1996), 304.

[6] Interview with Curtis (pseudonym), b. 1958, 24 July 2018; Interview with Gwen (pseudonym), b. 1951, 9 October 2018.

[7] Simon Scott, "Politically Bi", in *Bisexual Horizons: Politics, Histories, Lives,* ed. The Off Pink Collective (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1996), 239; Paul Smith, quoted in Rust, *Bisexuality and Lesbian Politics*, 237.

Glasgow (1988), as well as a London-based Bisexual Women's Group, a 'Bi-action' organising group, and a Radical Lesbian / Gay Identified Bisexual Network.[8] For some interviewees these organisations defined the bisexual 'community': for example Ian (b. 1962) explicitly dated the beginning of a 'bisexual community' to September 1981, the first meeting of London Bisexual Group.[9] This interpretation constructs the 'bisexual community' as 'organisationally-based', suggesting bisexuals formed a community around coherent organisations. However, more often in interviews, bisexual organisations did *not* map onto what interviewees seemed to mean when they discussed the 'bisexual community' or 'bisexual communities'. 'Community' was more often used as an abstract concept to refer more to a 'sense of togetherness' than any concrete organisation: 'the local queer community', 'feeling […] part of a community'.[10] In this case, the 'bisexual community' could be more broadly-defined as an 'identity-based' community, comprising everyone who identified as bisexual – although this inevitably excluded those who were attracted to multiple genders but did not identify as bisexual, including some of my interviewees. Interviewees also varied widely in how frequently they referred to notions of 'community' – one interviewee, Alison (b. 1967) mentioned 'community' or 'communities' 52 times in a two-hour interview, while another, Judith (b. 1954) mentioned 'community' only once in an interview that also lasted two hours.[11]

Oral historians of sexuality have also wrestled with the notion of 'community'. Boyd and Ramírez highlight the 'community-based and activist' impulses of many oral historians of queer or LGBT subjects.[12] However, more recent works of specifically *queer* oral history have been

---

[8] David Burkle, "Where From, Where To?", *Bi-Monthly*, January 1984, 3; David Smith, "News – Action – News", *Bi-Monthly*, April 1985, 6; Anonymous, "First meeting for Manchester Group", *Bi-Monthly*, June/July 1986, 5; Anonymous, "Stop Press: New Groups", *Bi-Monthly*, April 1988, 24; Sue George, "Longest-running bisexual women's group", *Bi-Monthly*, February/March 1986, 18; Anonymous, "News Monitor: Bi-Action", *Bi-Monthly*, January 1987, 4.
[9] Interview with Ian, b. 1962, 7 May 2019.
[10] Interview with Alison (pseudonym), b. 1967, 5 October 2018; Interview with Judith (pseudonym), b. 1954, 11 October 2018.
[11] Interview with Alison (pseudonym), b. 1967, 5 October 2018; Interview with Judith (pseudonym), b. 1954, 11 October 2018.
[12] Boyd and Ramírez, *Bodies of Evidence*, 15.

'ambivalent about the term *community*' because of its relationship to ideas about stable and unitary identity, as well as who it 'fails to represent'.[13] I share this ambivalence, not least because of the exclusionary nature of 'lesbian and gay' communities discussed in the previous chapter. I also want to critique the self-congratulatory narratives of some bisexuals, including some of my interviewees, that suggests that bisexual communities are uniquely inclusive and accepting: 'we are in a unique position to challenge yet another patriarchal ideology by being multi-cultural, multi-racial, multi-gendered, multi-experienced, multi-sexual'.[14] This understanding of bisexual communities and politics allows bisexuals to ignore their own exclusions and prejudices. Furthermore, the ways in which bisexuals defined themselves, implicitly or explicitly, *against* lesbian and gay politics, while perhaps understandable in the context of the exclusions discussed in the previous chapter, rendered claims to 'inclusivity' paradoxical and ultimately meaningless.

Murphy *et al* write that they agreed that they 'would not produce a community history predicated on identity politics' in their queer oral history project, and instead sought to 'queer the term *community*' by seeing it as 'unstable, multiple, and at times, contradictory'.[15] I follow this example in my own work through attention to multiple-gender-attraction as well as bisexuality, and also by analysing the 'multiple' and 'contradictory' communities in which bisexuals and those attracted to multiple genders were present. The chapter title should not be read as a definitive statement about the 'independent' nature of the bisexual communities, organisations and politics included in this chapter. Rather, the extent to which bisexual communities sought or achieved 'independence' from other groups changed over time, and is a key area of analysis. I therefore seek to move away from Udis-Keller's dismissal of 1970s bisexuals as 'not doing much' because they were not 'organised'.[16] Clare Hemmings argues, again in relation to the US context, that bisexual identity became increasingly associated with an 'independent bisexual community' over

---

[13] Murphy et al, "Queer Oral History", 13.
[14] Reba Weise, "The Bisexual Community", 305. In oral histories, this idea came up in particular in interviews with Ian, b. 1962, Alison (pseudonym), b. 1967, Kate, b. 1960, and Dave, b. 1960.
[15] Murphy et al, "Queer Oral History", 14.
[16] Udis-Keller, "Identity / Politics", 22.

time, but this was not a stable or linear process.[17] Bisexuality and multiple-gender-attraction could be manifested in lesbian and gay communities, as discussed in Chapter One, and some nascent bisexual organisations, but also in spaces that emphasised 'sexual freedom', 'polymorphous perversity' and SM. These different communities show that teleological narratives about the 'development of a bisexual community' in the 1970s and 1980s are overly simplistic. Some interviewees felt that a 'bisexual community' existed as part of organisations such as GLF in the 1970s, whereas others felt that a bisexual community did not exist and had never existed. These differences were exacerbated by vague explanations of 'bisexual politics' that emphasised inclusivity but were broadly undefined.

The second section of this chapter, then, focusses on the *politics* of bisexuality. During the 1990s in particular, social-scientific analyses of bisexuality and politics proliferated, especially in the US context, although these were lacking much historical perspective. First published in 1995, the edited collection *Bisexual Politics: Theories, Queries and Visions* included chapters on 'radical bisexuality', bisexuality and identity politics, and bisexual feminism.[18] Other, similar edited collections focussing on the UK context were also published in the mid-1990s, such as *Bisexual Horizons: Politics, Histories, Lives* (1996), or the more theoretically-oriented *The Bisexual Imaginary: Representation, Identity and Desire* (1997).[19] These all contain a very large number of chapters on a wide range of topics – itself evidence of bisexual politics' enthusiasm for diversity, but also evidence of its drawbacks in terms of a lack of clear standpoint or argument. Although some chapters, especially in *The Bisexual Imaginary*, critique the notion of a specifically bisexual inclusivity, most enthusiastically reiterate the idea of bisexuality as 'an inclusive embracing philosophy, not divisive'.[20] Specific discussions about what this means in practice are generally

---

[17] Hemmings, *Bisexual Spaces*, 86.
[18] Naomi Tucker, ed., *Bisexual Politics: Theories, Queries and Visions*, 2nd ed. (New York, NY: Routledge, 2013).
[19] Off Pink Collective, *Bisexual Horizons;* Bi Academic Intervention, ed., *The Bisexual Imaginary: Representation, Identity and Desire* (London: Cassell, 1997).
[20] An example of a more critical piece is Storr, "The Sexual Reproduction of 'Race'", 73-88. The less critical quote is from Clare Bear, "BAD (Bisexuals Affirming Diversity): Bistory", in *Bisexual Horizons: Politics, Histories, Lives,* ed. The Off Pink Collective (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1996), 301.

more lacking.

My interviewees, along with articles in the gay press, the anti-sexist men's press, and the bisexual newsletter *Bi-Monthly*, provide the historical context for these politics as they were put into practice. During the 1970s and 1980s, bisexuality was constructed as highly sexual. As discussed in the previous chapter, this led to a rejection from lesbian and gay communities. In this chapter, I will focus more specifically on how, due to a binary understanding of 'sexual' and 'political', this sexualisation worked against the formation of a coherent bisexual politics. Some bisexuals and people attracted to multiple genders attempted to reimagine a bisexuality that was both political *and* sexual, through its embrace of diversity and its refusal to exclude people. This enabled them to characterise connections between bisexuality and pornography, SM, non-monogamy, and gender non-normativity as sites of political subversion and resistance. Many individuals found this a helpful and empowering political basis for their identity. However, in concrete situations such as the development of political communities, the vague language of 'inclusion' could be difficult to pin down. Bisexual politics and bisexual communities therefore informed one another in multiple, not always constructive, ways. The lack of clarity in bisexual politics contributed to some interviewees being particularly enthusiastic about bisexual communities, while others did not even recognise their existence.

Bisexual Communities

The Twenty-First Century

Although the interviews focussed on the 1970s and 1980s, the life-story structure meant that many interviewees also discussed the 1990s, 2000s, and their current situation at the time of our interviews. These give context for their memories of the 1970s and 1980s, and a longer-term perspective on the importance of bisexual communities and politics.

Alison, who ran a group for bisexuals at the time of our interview, and attended another in a different city, spoke about the existence of a 'community' of bisexuals, and was enthusiastic about her role in it. She repeatedly used the language of community, in relation to 'the bi

community', 'the wider community' and the 'LGBT community': 'it's been a huge relief to actually find the bi community […] [we] will put the time and effort in for the wider [LGBT] community. [And that] does enhance the reputation of the bi community'.[21]

However, her assessment was far from universal. Of the seventeen people I interviewed, ten were not part of any bisexual or LGBTQ groups at the time of our interview. Of those who were, four regularly attended meetings of groups specific to bisexuals, while three others discussed being part of general LGBTQ groups.[22] Considering that much of my initial interviewee recruitment was through these groups, this is a surprisingly small number. As mentioned above, some interviewees questioned whether a 'bisexual community' existed at all. Others said that they felt there was a 'bisexual community', but it was not one that they felt included in.

Those who felt excluded from the 'bisexual community' generally explained this by focussing on the nature and function of the community. For example, Neil (b. 1958) said that although he attended once, he was not interested in BiCon (the annual National Bisexual Convention / Conference), because 'a lot of BiCon was about – was about the… the community […] Selfishly, that's less of an issue for me, and I'm not sure I can contribute much to that'.[23] He felt that 'there are bigger issues in the world', which he focussed on instead.[24] Even Ian, who was involved in bisexual activism, acknowledged that 'it is not for everybody who's bisexually identified'.[25] He suggested that this was because some people felt put off by the fact that it was, in his view, primarily an emotional community: 'a community of people with mental health issues […] a reflection of the effects of the endless, *endless*, *endless* erasure and phobia, that's out there'.[26] This reflects some of the stigma about bisexuality as an early stage of development, and bisexuals

[21] Interview with Alison (pseudonym), b. 1967, 5 October 2018.
[22] Alison (b. 1967), Ian (b. 1962), Louise (b. 1966) and Ossian (b. 1954) attended groups specific to bisexual people. Aidan (b. 1971), Chryssy (b. 1967) and Lisa (b. 1954) attended wider LGBTQ groups.
[23] Interview with Neil (pseudonym), b. 1958, 26 September 2018.
[24] Interview with Neil (pseudonym), b. 1958, 26 September 2018.
[25] Interview with Ian, b. 1962, 7 May 2019.
[26] Interview with Ian, b. 1962, 7 May 2019.

as potentially immature or unstable.

Louise (b. 1966), who ran a bisexual group at the time of our interview, remembered feeling ambivalent about the 'bi community' when she began identifying as bisexual in the early 2000s:

> My interactions with the bi community were… kind of a bit… unsatisfying, really? […] it felt really kind of, everything felt very home*made*, it felt very *new*, it felt like people were still, kind of, ironing out the nitty-gritty, erm... didn't feel like there *was*, like, a shared understanding or a culture, like everything was *still* being chewed over.[27]

She was also put off by the aesthetic of the 'bisexual world', which she compared unfavourably to the aesthetic for lesbians:

> The aesthetic of young lesbians at the time was very compelling, very iconic, very kind of, you know, the lesbian James Dean look. Erm… it was amazing. And… I came out as bisexual, into this world that was a bit like, mmm no, you know, kind of – the purple, and the goth boots, and the… none of that says anything to me. It doesn't speak to me.[28]

Although the criticism of 'purple' and 'goth boots' can seem trivial, it highlights the importance of a particular style and aesthetic, as distinct from lesbian style, in the formation of bisexual subculture. Dick Hebdige argues that the 'point' behind the style of subcultures is 'the communication of a significant *difference* […] and the parallel communication of a group *identity*'.[29] For Louise, bisexuals were not only presenting their difference to 'straight' culture, but also to lesbian culture, which she found more appealing.

Louise's assessment of the 'bi community' at the beginning of the twenty-first century as 'homemade', alternative and somewhat unappealing was strikingly similar to Lisa's (b. 1954) recollection of it in the 1980s: 'I actually went to a couple of National Bisexual Conferences […] like almost *any* movement that's first starting, they were very much fringe affairs. Erm, they were full of people that were very alternative in lots of ways […] you had to be the awkward squad, in a way'.[30] The continuities between Lisa's impression in the 1980s and Louise's in the 2000s

---

[27] Interview with Louise, b. 1966, 27 July 2018.
[28] Interview with Louise, b. 1966, 27 July 2018.
[29] Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*, 3rd ed. (London: Routledge, 2002), 102.
[30] Interview with Lisa, b. 1954, 4 April 2019.

complicates any straightforward narrative of 'progress'. Although organised bisexual groups exist, and have done so since the start of the 1980s, their relatively niche aesthetic and politics were off-putting to several interviewees.

Interviewees' relations to other communities also show more continuity than change over time. Alison said that the rejections and insults she experienced from lesbian and gay people during the 1980s 'really have not changed' – 'I haven't been to a Pride in… 32 years […] where there has not been at least one biphobic incident'.[31] Three other interviewees discussed being part of the SM and kink scene, in ways which echoed the links between bisexuality and SM during the 'lesbian sex wars', and London Lesbian and Gay Centre's ban on bisexual and SM groups. For example, Neil explicitly linked kink to bisexuality and multiple-gender-attraction: 'nearly all the women [on the kink scene] seem to be bisexual. Or say they are. And, a lot of the men are as well. Or heteroflex – flexible at least'.[32] When I asked him why he thought so many people on the kink scene were bisexual, he referred back to the idea of 'universal' bisexuality, and suggested that 'people that go to those kind of events are… er, more likely to be open-minded, and open to talk about their… dark, deepest desires'.[33] This parallels themes from the 1970s – both in terms of the universalising of bisexuality, and the idea that it is somehow more radical or 'open-minded'.

These brief discussions about the 'bisexual community' in the twenty-first century counter any teleological ideas about the 'eventual development' of a coherent bisexual community. Although some interviewees were deeply involved in bisexual organisations and spoke positively about 'the community', others felt alienated from it or questioned whether a 'bisexual community' existed at all. There were also links between twenty-first century discourses about bisexual communities, and discourses that were prevalent during the 1970s and 1980s – in relation to perceived 'newness' or 'awkwardness', links to mental health problems, and links to SM. Ian made this point explicitly – 'there is absolutely a continuous link back to [the first

[31] Interview with Alison (pseudonym), b. 1967, 5 October 2018.
[32] Interview with Neil (pseudonym), b. 1958, 26 September 2018.
[33] Interview with Neil (pseudonym), b. 1958, 26 September 2018.

meeting of London Bisexual Group] in terms of, lots of the attitudes'.[34]

While coherent bisexual groups did not exist in the 1970s, and did come into existence during and after the 1980s, my interviewees' experiences demonstrate that the relationship between bisexuality, multiple-gender-attraction and communities did not fit into a straightforward narrative of 'development'.

The 1970s

During the 1970s there were no organisations in Britain specifically concerned with bisexuals and bisexuality. The closest thing to this was the bisexuality discussion groups at two of C.H.E.'s conferences, but these were very temporary and had no independent existence beyond the gay liberation movement. Of course, the lack of a named, specific focus on bisexuality did not necessarily mean that bisexual people and those attracted to multiple genders were unable to form communities, or that there were no organisations that considered multiple-gender-attraction and bisexuality among other topics. However, the evidence from the 1970s and interviewees' reflections do suggest that it was difficult to form coherent communities specifically focussed on those attracted to multiple genders. For most of the 1970s, interviewees therefore found communities in groups that were not explicitly aimed at bisexuals.

In an article on the US bisexual movement during the 1970s, Stephen Donaldson argues that although there were no coherent bisexual organisations, bisexuals and those attracted to multiple genders nevertheless found community in other groups and movements, especially the sexual freedom movement.[35] One interviewee, Carmen (b. 1949) had been involved in a British equivalent of this in the late 1960s and 1970s – 'the underground movement – as we called it, the counter culture', including the alternative arts centre Arts Lab and the underground pornography

[34] Interview with Ian, b. 1962, 7 May 2019.
[35] Stephen Donaldson, "The Bisexual Movement's Beginnings in the 70s: A Personal Retrospective", in *Bisexual Politics: Theories, Queries and Visions*, ed. Naomi Tucker, 2nd ed. (New York, NY: Routledge, 2013), 33.

magazine *Suck*.[36] She characterised this movement as defined by 'experiment', 'freedom' and 'exploring': 'this all felt absolutely right for me that we should be exploring, and being honest […] exploring the body and our thoughts and things – I was part of a very experimental world'.[37] This included group sex, Reichian orgasm therapy and 'encounter groups' linked to the anti-psychiatry practices of the Esalen Institute in California: 'you often took your clothes off, or some of your clothes off – these were sort of exploratory body games […] you know, lots of touching with strangers – sometimes, sometimes fucking. Not very much'.[38] She said that in many of these groups 'it didn't matter, whether it was with a woman or with a man', although there was the assumption that 'it was… going to be heterosexual'.[39] Similarly, although the San Francisco-based Sexual Freedom League was 'not explicitly bi (most members identified as heterosexual)', Donaldson describes it as 'a predecessor of the bi movement' because it emphasised transgressing sexual boundaries and experimenting with multiple genders.[40] Hemmings echoes this, arguing that those – such as Udis-Keller – who failed to identify bisexual communities in the 'organised orgies' of groups such as the Sexual Freedom League, in favour of the more coherent political organisations founded in the 1980s, were simply demonstrating their own desire for a bisexual identity that was more organised and politically-oriented, and less sexual.[41] For Carmen, counter-cultural spaces were a key site of multiple-gender-attraction because 'it felt to me that one had the absolute right to – disregard gender, and disregard, erm… narrow moral ideas about… who one should have sex with and how'.[42] Counter-cultural groups emphasising sexual freedom and exploration were therefore one way in which bisexuality and multiple-gender-attraction could find community, even when it was not explicitly named as such.

Another area in which bisexual men, in particular, were able to find a sense of community

[36] Interview with Carmen (pseudonym), b. 1949, 31 May 2019.
[37] Interview with Carmen (pseudonym), b. 1949, 31 May 2019.
[38] Interview with Carmen (pseudonym), b. 1949, 31 May 2019.
[39] Interview with Carmen (pseudonym), b. 1949, 31 May 2019.
[40] Donaldson, "The Bisexual Movement's Beginnings", 33.
[41] Hemmings, *Bisexual Spaces*, 147.
[42] Interview with Carmen (pseudonym), b. 1949, 31 May 2019.

during the 1970s was the anti-sexist men's movement. The movement itself developed in the early 1970s, drawing on some of the late-1960s themes of experimentation and counter-culture that Carmen experienced in the sexual liberation movement, and seeking to transform masculinity in line with feminist critiques.[43] Many feminist women, however, were sceptical of these groups and men's involvement in feminism generally.[44] Bisexual men and men attracted to multiple genders had been involved in the movement from its inception, although it was not until the wake of the 1980 Anti-Sexist Men's Conference that a group of bisexual men decided to gather to 'share this new strength in acknowledging our identity with others, and extend the support we had gained from each other'.[45] Initially, they focussed on producing a special issue of the *Anti-Sexist Men's Newsletter* focussed on bisexuality. Some articles in this issue were by men involved in gay liberation politics, but most were by men in long-term relationships with women, who had previously considered themselves to be straight – a different perspective, therefore, from that of bisexuals involved in the gay liberation movement.

The *Anti-Sexist Men's Newsletter* bisexuality special issue could be seen as a first attempt to assert a bisexual politics, although the articles diverged over what this might mean. As argued in the previous chapter, radical gay liberationists often left little room for bisexuality in their binary understanding of 'gay' and 'straight'. One article, by Ronald Littlewood, also made this argument, critiquing the gay liberation movement for 'polarising sexual preference', leaving little room for the 'by far larger number of people who know they are not exclusively homo-sexual, and may indeed feel uncomfortable in the company of people who believe they are'.[46] Littlewood also reiterated some of the ideas about bisexuality discussed in the Introduction, confidently asserting that 'the nature of human sexuality is bi-sexual and the totally hetero or homosexual person is rare to the point of being non-existent'.[47] In contrast, another article, by Christopher Poke, was

[43] Lucy Delap, "Feminism, Masculinities and Emotional Politics in Late Twentieth Century Britain", *Cultural and Social History* (2018), 2.
[44] Delap, "Feminism, Masculinities", 2.
[45] Burkle, "Where From", 3.
[46] Ronald Littlewood, "Bisexuality: A personal view", *Anti-Sexist Men's Newsletter,* Jan/Feb 1981, 18.
[47] Littlewood, "Bisexuality", 19.

much more sympathetic to the gay liberationist position and said it was 'not surprising […] that many gay activists distrust self-defined bisexuals'.[48] He argued that bisexuals 'exploit the gay scene' before 'drift[ing] back into passing for straight', and that bisexuals 'represent in part a heterosexist culture that is directly oppressing gays', concluding that 'I am not oppressed because I am heterosexual, but because I am homosexual. The conditioning hasn't been totally successful in my case'.[49] These very divergent political standpoints were also acknowledged in the editorial – 'some of us in the collective now believe that a separate bisexual political stand is divisive and reactionary; while some feel […] that bisexuality offers a liberating option' – and suggest one reason why a bisexual politics was difficult to establish, and no coherent bisexual organisation was set up in the 1970s.[50] Littlewood also referred to the lack of bisexual organisations:

> As far as I am aware there are no organisations catering for the practising or aspiring bi-sexual. I have tried myself to form such a group without remarkable success and there have been other attempts that have run into the same difficulties. There are private circles however which can be very helpful […] with the help of friends I am preparing some notes on how to find partners and will send a copy to anyone* interested on receipt of a stamped, addressed envelope. (*Over 21).[51]

For much of the 1970s, then, as Littlewood acknowledges, people attracted to multiple genders found community in groups that did not explicitly focus on bisexuality or multiple-gender-attraction – whether gay or lesbian groups, as discussed in the previous chapter; counter-cultural or anti-sexist movements that presumed heterosexuality but left room for the potential of multiple-gender-attraction; or through 'private circles' of friendship or partnership. In 1981, however, this changed. The *Anti-Sexist Men's Newsletter* special issue led to the formation of a regular open meeting for bisexual people, which in turn became London Bisexual Group. In the next section I will discuss London Bisexual Group and other bisexual organisations that developed over the course of the 1980s. Although this was a significant change, it is important to

---

[48] Christopher Poke, "A Foot in Both Camps", *Anti-Sexist Men's Newsletter,* Jan/Feb 1981, 29.
[49] Poke, "Both Camps", 29.
[50] David Burkle, Andrew Doig, Paul Greenhalgh, Christopher Poke, Bill Roche, Gareth Thomas and Tony. "Editorial", *Anti-Sexist Men's Newsletter*, Jan/Feb 1981, 4.
[51] Littlewood, "Bisexuality", 21.

note that the divided and incoherent politics that beset the *Anti-Sexist Men's Newsletter* special issue continued into the 1980s and beyond. Many who were attracted to multiple genders still felt that the 'bisexual community', defined in terms of its organisations, did not represent them.

The 1980s

The first official meeting of London Bisexual Group, which was the first specifically bisexual organisation in the UK, took place on 1st September 1981 in the Heaven nightclub. In 1984, it set up its own newsletter, *Bi-Monthly*, and held the first National Bisexual Conference. Edinburgh Bisexual Group was formed later in 1984, followed by groups in Brighton, Manchester and Glasgow, and *Bi-Monthly* adopted a more nationwide focus, no longer attached specifically to the London group. By the end of the 1980s there were also Bisexual Helplines in Edinburgh and London, and the National Bisexual Conference was an annual occurrence, usually hosted by either the London or Edinburgh group.

Ian attended the first meeting of London Bisexual Group, after seeing an advert for it in *Time Out*. He remembered 'about a hundred – certainly dozens and dozens of people', and a sense that 'this is different, this is ours'.[52] The group was primarily founded by David Burkle, whose background was in the anti-sexist men's movement, but most attendees had previously 'come from experience of the lesbian / gay community'.[53] Ian emphasised the importance of the *Time Out* advertisement in encouraging a range of attendees – 'if it had *just* been advertised in the anti-sexist men's [movement], and the lesbian / gay community, fewer people would have seen it, and it would have been even more different'.[54] In the early 1990s, Ian became the group's Secretary, and was on the Committee for several years.

I also interviewed Kate (b. 1960), one of the founders of Edinburgh Bisexual Group. She set it up with a few others after attending some meetings of the London group, which she found

[52] Interview with Ian, b. 1962, 7 May 2019.
[53] Interview with Ian, b. 1962, 7 May 2019.
[54] Interview with Ian, b. 1962, 7 May 2019.

'pretty amazing, actually being in the same place as a load of bisexual people', and organising a bisexual workshop at an Edinburgh-based lesbian and gay socialist conference.[55] Edinburgh Bisexual Group met in the Edinburgh Lesbian and Gay Centre, initially on a monthly basis, but quite quickly 'moved to meeting weekly, because nobody could remember if it was the first Monday of the month or the first Friday of the month or whatever'.[56] Although she emphasised that the group was run on a non-hierarchical basis without any official leadership, Kate had clearly been an influential member – she kept hold of the membership list for the group, and was frequently interviewed in the Scottish press about bisexuality and the group. Another interviewee, Dave (b. 1960), was not a founding member but joined Edinburgh Bisexual Group in its early days, and also became involved in helping to co-ordinate the group.[57]

Parallels can be drawn between these bisexual organisations and the early years of some gay organisations. The Bisexual Helplines could be compared to Switchboard, the local groups to the decentralised nature of GLF groups, the conferences to C.H.E.'s conferences, and *Bi-Monthly* to *C.H.E. Bulletin*, *Come Together*, or *Gay News*. Some of the tensions discussed in Chapter One in relation to C.H.E.'s political and social functions can also be seen in London Bisexual Group, although with a different trajectory. Ian described the process of devising a constitution for the group, and how this was scorned by other groups for being overly-bureaucratic: 'it... became, possibly the only bisexual group to have a constitution […] lots of the people from other groups would go "ha ha ha, you know, who needs a constitution?" - and the answer to that turns out to be *you* do, when things go wrong'.[58] In contrast, Dave emphasised that Edinburgh Bisexual Group was run along less structured lines – 'it was a group of people who helped do an awful lot of things together[…] whole bunch of us were sharing the work', and Kate remembered it as consistently 'uninstitutional': 'We didn't have a Chair, we didn't have a committee, we shared – all the tasks,

[55] Interview with Kate, b. 1960, 31 August 2019.
[56] Interview with Kate, b. 1960, 31 August 2019.
[57] Interview with Dave, b. 1960, 11 January 2020.
[58] Interview with Ian, b. 1962, 7 May 2019.

with anybody who was willing to share them […] it wasn't that it was a group run by one set of people *for* another set of people, it was a group that was *entirely* run *by* all the people who were there'.[59]

Both London and Edinburgh Bisexual Groups 'started as a combination of a social group and a political group', and at the end of the 1980s London Bisexual Group had also developed a 'personal group', to provide counselling and support.[60] Over time, the London group focussed more on the social and personal functions, recalled quite bitterly by Ian as 'the political side went […] coz that involved work. And effort'.[61] The Edinburgh group seems to have maintained the political focus more consistently, perhaps due to its origins in lesbian and gay socialism. Kate also emphasised that its political and social functions were inextricably linked. One of the social activities that Edinburgh Bisexual Group organised was that a lot of the women members went to the Turkish baths on a Sunday morning, which happened to be at the same time as a group of radical lesbian feminists also attended:

> we made connections, and those – those kinds of barriers started to break down? And we discovered they weren't as hostile to bisexuals as we thought they were, and they discovered bisexuals weren't as awful as they thought we were [*laughs*] […] so that was a kind of, political outcome of one of our social events.[62]

The difference in location of the two groups is again significant here. As Lisa speculated, London was 'a place that's big enough to break into tribes', so it could be that Edinburgh's smaller population resulted in less of the hostilities seen in London.[63] This can be seen in the relationship between Edinburgh Bisexual Group and Edinburgh's Lesbian and Gay Centre – unlike the London Lesbian and Gay Centre, the Edinburgh Centre hosted the Bisexual Group's meetings from its inception – but it was also the case in terms of relations between bisexual groups. In London, as well as London Bisexual Group there was also the Bisexual Women's Group, Bi-Action, and the Radical Lesbian/Gay Identified Bisexual Network. Ultimately, these numerous different groups,

---

[59] Interview with Dave, b. 1960, 11 January 2020; Interview with Kate, b. 1960, 31 August 2019.
[60] Interview with Ian, b. 1962, 7 May 2019.
[61] Interview with Ian, b. 1962, 7 May 2019.
[62] Interview with Kate, b. 1960, 31 August 2019.
[63] Interview with Lisa, b. 1954, 4 April 2019.

and conflict over the social, political and personal functions of the group, led to the gradual dissolution of London Bisexual Group – Ian said that it closed because members interested in the social side began meeting elsewhere, and the personal group became closed to new members.[64] Edinburgh Bisexual Group ran until 2000, primarily because some of the core members moved away: 'and it had – done its job, perhaps'.[65] Kate said that the remaining group members made a conscious decision to 'formally close it' rather than allow it to 'fizzle out', perhaps an effort to avoid the more fractious and drawn-out decline of the London group.[66]

As stated above, London Bisexual Group had its origins in the men's anti-sexist movement, which shaped its responses to gender and feminism. In her article on the men's anti-sexist movement, Lucy Delap points out that despite their ostensibly shared purpose, anti-sexist men could often respond quite defensively to critiques raised by feminists.[67] This defensiveness can also be seen amongst the organisers of London Bisexual Group. For example, the group initially met at Heaven nightclub on Tuesdays, which were 'mixed' nights for gay and straight people – or, in Kate's words, 'that's the night you get, if you're not a popular group'.[68] Heaven was repeatedly criticised by feminists for excluding women, and London Bisexual Group's organisers sought to reassure female attendees: 'Heaven has had a bad press as far as women are concerned but on Tuesday nights it is a safe and OK place for women to be'.[69] It seems that many women were unconvinced, however. The first meeting of the group was attended by 62 men and just 14 women. By 1984, when they published the first issue of *Bi-Monthly*, Burkle wrote that they hoped 1984 would see 'a marked increase in the number of women who come to the group', but followed this immediately with the slightly defensive insistence that 'the proportion of women at our meetings compares favourably with other gay groups'.[70] In our interview, Ian stressed that the

[64] Interview with Ian, b. 1962, 7 May 2019.
[65] Interview with Kate, b. 1960, 31 August 2019.
[66] Interview with Kate, b. 1960, 31 August 2019.
[67] Delap, "Feminism, Masculinities", 6.
[68] Interview with Kate, b. 1960, 31 August 2019.
[69] Burkle, "Where From", 4.
[70] Burkle, "Where From", 3.

national conferences had 'always' been 'majority female', but acknowledged that London Bisexual Group itself was 'more male than female', although he also took pains to point out that 'I *cannot* remember any… complaints' about the gender disparity, and that 'there were always plenty of visible – female activists […] in a way that it – is not the case in lots of, in quotes, "mixed" LGBT groups'.[71] He also said that the gender disparity in London Bisexual Group was exacerbated when the Bisexual Women's Group was formed – although the reasons why women might have wanted to form a separate group were not explored.[72]

The male dominance in the early bisexual movement could be seen as both an effect and a cause of the lesbian feminist approaches described in Chapter One – an effect, because they encouraged women attracted to multiple genders to 'pick a side' and identify as lesbian, and so there may have been fewer women identifying as bisexual to attend bisexual groups; and a cause, because it lent weight to the lesbian feminist argument that bisexuality was patriarchal. Edinburgh Bisexual Group appears to have differed from this trend, however, in that both Dave and Kate emphasised that it was 'a very mixed-gender group'.[73] This also included trans people who felt excluded by the more 'restrictive' trans group in Edinburgh and so 'they tended to come to EBG'.[74] Over the course of the 1980s, bisexual groups in general became less male-dominated. This shift can in large part be attributed to the effects of the AIDS epidemic, which I will discuss below.

While groups and events specifically focussed on bisexuality were established over the course of the 1980s, it can be questioned how far this 'community' was representative of most people who were attracted to multiple genders, or identified as bisexual. In particular, London Bisexual Group's origins in the anti-sexist men's movement led to an often tone-deaf approach to the concerns of bisexual women, and a hostility towards lesbian feminism that could become just

[71] Interview with Ian, b. 1962, 7 May 2019.
[72] Interview with Ian, b. 1962, 7 May 2019.
[73] Interview with Dave, b. 1960, 11 January 2020.
[74] Interview with Kate, b. 1960, 31 August 2019.

as 'exclusionary' as the politics they sought to reject. Edinburgh Bisexual Group seems to have been less beset by these divisions, as a result of its origins in the Scottish lesbian and gay socialist movement, less hostile relationships with Scottish gay and lesbian groups, and a smaller bisexual 'community' overall which provided less room for divisions.

Bisexual Communities and AIDS

The AIDS epidemic during the 1980s had a devastating effect on many individual bisexuals and people attracted to multiple genders, through loss of life and loss of loved ones. It also affected the development of a separate bisexual community, and the inclusion or exclusion of multiple-gender-attraction by other communities. However, these effects were not straightforward, and interviewees' recollections varied. On the whole, the hostile imagery of bisexuals as 'vectors' of the virus led to a more close-knit bisexual community, but also one that was more defensive against perceived criticism.

Both Donaldson and Hemmings highlight that the increasing dominance of women in the bisexual movement 'may reflect how AIDS has decimated the male population'.[75] However, both focus on the US context, which as Matt Cook points out was substantially different from the UK in many ways – the existence of the NHS in the UK made healthcare battles less intense, for example, and Clause 28 provided a different focus for activism.[76] Many articles in the British gay press during the 1980s also emphasised the differences between the US and UK in relation to AIDS, and explicitly associated AIDS with the US – for example stressing that the disease first took hold in the US, that the most attention-grabbing activism was taking place there, and that the death rates were considerably higher. In relation to the specific context of bisexuals in Britain, Ian described 'the impact on the *lives*' as enormous, but also said that 'the number of people who were – part of the bisexual community, who died […] *was* never, that large'.[77] Ossian (b. 1954) spoke at length

[75] Donaldson, "The Bisexual Movement's Beginnings", 37.
[76] Matt Cook, "'Archives of Feeling': The AIDS Crisis in Britain 1987", *History Workshop Journal* 83, no. 1 (2017): 71.
[77] Interview with Ian, b. 1962, 7 May 2019.

during our interview about his many friends who had died from AIDS, and their funerals, at which he performed poetry.[78] Although he mentioned at a different point in the interview that at least one of these friends identified as bisexual, their bisexuality or attraction to multiple genders *in particular* was not seen as relevant in how they were treated, or their deaths. Dave also remembered AIDS being a 'big thing in Edinburgh', but this was because of 'the drug scene at the time' rather than gay or bisexual men in particular.[79] Furthermore, as Ian pointed out, despite London Bisexual Group being initially dominated by men, women had always been the majority of attendees at the bisexual conferences, which could suggest that the demographic shift in UK bisexual communities was less dramatic than in the US. While Hemmings and Donaldson talk about AIDS decimating the population of bisexual men in the US, then, in terms of death rates the impact of AIDS on UK bisexual communities was less clear-cut.

Another devastating impact of AIDS on the US bisexual community was because it led to the stigmatisation of promiscuity. The San Francisco Bisexual Center closed down in 1984, because 'its continued emphasis on non-monogamy, group sex, and SM as political expressions' seemed no longer appropriate 'when people were dying as a result of sexual practices that had not previously been considered dangerous'.[80] We can also see this move away from sexual freedom discourses amongst UK bisexuals and those attracted to multiple genders. As I will discuss below, towards the end of the 1970s there were signs of a developing discourse around bisexuality that attempted to dismantle the binary between 'sexual' and 'political', and argued that bisexuals' supposed promiscuity meant that they were more politically radical and inclusive. However, these characterisations occurred much less frequently during the 1980s. The AIDS crisis meant that the nascent efforts to characterise promiscuity as more 'radical' became much less effective and appealing.

However, again the situation in the UK was less clear-cut. Although the San Francisco

---

[78] Interview with Ossian (pseudonym), b. 1954, 13 August 2018.
[79] Interview with Dave, b. 1960, 11 January 2020.
[80] Hemmings, *Bisexual Spaces,* 158.

Bisexual Center closed down in the US, which suggests that AIDS impeded the development of an independent bisexual community there, there was a proliferation of bisexual organisations in the UK over the course of the 1980s. There was even a bisexual advisory committee on AIDS, which advised the Health Education Authority. Although Ian argued that this committee was 'totally ignored', the fact that one was set up, distinct from the gay men's advisory committee, reflected and arguably extended the sense of an independent bisexual community.[81] While discourses about the radical potential of promiscuity did fade from prominence in UK bisexual politics, then, this did not lead to the closure of bisexual organisations.

The stigmatisation of promiscuity does appear to have led to further exclusion of bisexuals from gay and lesbian communities. Alison talked about the stereotype of being 'disease carriers, these dirty filthy pervy bisexuals […] who were transmitting HIV to nice ordinary people', and Nigel (b. 1963) talked about the 'hostility' and 'misunderstanding' about bisexuality because 'some people thought that it was bisexuals that were spreading AIDS'.[82] In relation to gay male communities, Ian talked about the 're-gaying' of AIDS, which he said in practice meant that gay men '*actively* sought to erase' bisexuality.[83] In relation to lesbian communities, Lisa described the '*absolute* paranoia, that bisexuals were – a conduit to AIDS, for the lesbian community', because of bisexual women's relationships with men.[84] One lesbian interviewee, Elsa (b. 1951), described how she had also experienced this fear when a bisexual woman propositioned her for sex. After finding out that the other woman had recently had sex with a man in Amsterdam, Elsa said 'that completely er – killed it for me'.[85] Elsa also linked her fears to a previous AIDS scare, when her partner's ex-girlfriend had falsely claimed to be HIV-positive: 'That was a horrifying time for us, and we went and were... tested, and I think had to wait two weeks for the results,

[81] Interview with Ian, b. 1962, 7 May 2019.
[82] Interview with Alison (pseudonym), b. 1967, 5 October 2018; Interview with Nigel, b. 1963, 12 January 2019.
[83] Interview with Ian, b. 1962, 7 May 2019.
[84] Interview with Lisa, b. 1954, 4 April 2019.
[85] Interview with Elsa (pseudonym), b. 1951, 29 January 2019.

which was nightmarish time'.[86] It is therefore easy to see why she would be particularly sensitive to any potential risk of contracting HIV. However, the specific references to the woman's bisexual identity signify that bisexuality and recent sexual experience with a man, alongside the threatening spectre of Amsterdam (with connotations of unrestricted sex and unusual sexual practices) were also key factors in Elsa's response, indicating that bisexuals were seen as particularly risky sexual partners.

However, other interviewees gave more equivocal assessments of the effect that AIDS had on the exclusion of bisexuals. Curtis said that 'the stigma was against gay men, basically. And drug addicts […] I don't ever remember that link to, to erm, bisexuals'.[87] He was also ambivalent about the impact of AIDS on sexual behaviour in general – 'Were we more careful? Well… I guess, in a way we *weren't*' – although he later said that 'Sex became less *common*. I'm sure of that. But we didn't suddenly stop doing it'.[88] He experienced difficulties due to the epidemic – in particular, not volunteering to give blood at his police training college for fear that he would have to answer the question about sex with men, and that his bosses might find out – but this was as a result of his being a man who had sex with men, not specifically as someone attracted to multiple genders.

Alison's reflections on AIDS and the bisexual community showed the complex interrelationship between a bisexual community that was 'independent' and one that was part of the 'wider LGBT community'.[89] She said that hostility and stereotypes linked to AIDS led bisexual people to feel 'less safe in both gay and straight spaces', and 'turned us in on ourselves'.[90] It is not entirely clear whether by 'ourselves' she was referring specifically to bisexual people and those attracted to multiple genders, or the 'wider LGBT community'.[91] 'Turn[ing] us in on ourselves' could be meant similarly to 'turning on ourselves' – that is, through infighting and hostility – or

[86] Interview with Elsa (pseudonym), b. 1951, 29 January 2019.
[87] Interview with Curtis (pseudonym), b. 1958, 24 July 2018.
[88] Interview with Curtis (pseudonym), b. 1958, 24 July 2018.
[89] Interview with Alison (pseudonym), b. 1967, 5 October 2018.
[90] Interview with Alison (pseudonym), b. 1967, 5 October 2018.
[91] Interview with Alison (pseudonym), b. 1967, 5 October 2018.

could refer to becoming more close-knit and supportive, which would arguably strengthen an independent bisexual community. Subsequent comments about spending more time with other bisexual people seems to suggest it is the latter meaning: 'feeling like you don't have to explain, it is so much *easier* around bi people'.[92] However, Alison also linked AIDS, and increasingly hostile attitudes towards LGBTQ people, to Section 28, which she thought had had a particularly negative impact on bisexual community – it 'stymied discussion and thought about our identities, and sexuality' and ultimately meant that it was 'easier for lesbian and gay people to find their community than it has been for either trans or bi people. We've ended up being more marginalised'.[93]

The effect of AIDS on bisexual communities and politics was therefore a multifaceted one, and interviewees' recollections varied. For many bisexuals and people attracted to multiple genders in Britain, a key effect of AIDS was the greater stigmatisation of promiscuity. Coupled with the hyper-sexualisation of bisexuality, which I will discuss below, this led to further exclusion from gay, lesbian and straight communities. This exclusion made bisexual communities both more close-knit and more defensive, which in turn affected the development of bisexual politics.

In some ways, then, bisexual communities changed significantly over the 1970s and 1980s. Whereas in the 1970s bisexuals and those attracted to multiple genders had to find communities in groups, networks and movements that did not specifically relate to bisexuality, by the end of the 1980s there were a range of organisations and events that focussed specifically on bisexuality, organisations which arguably became more tight-knit in response to the AIDS crisis.

However, this narrative of 'development' overlooks several continuities. The importance of the sexual freedom movement to those attracted to multiple genders in the 1970s intensified

---

[92] Interview with Alison (pseudonym), b. 1967, 5 October 2018.
[93] Interview with Alison (pseudonym), b. 1967, 5 October 2018.

the stigmatisation of bisexuality as particularly 'sexual', which in turn affected narratives around bisexuality and AIDS, and bisexuality and politics in general. The origins of London Bisexual Group in the anti-sexist men's movement of the 1970s also increased feminist scepticism about bisexuality, intensified further by the male dominance of the bisexual movement and its links to gay male spaces such as the Heaven nightclub. Issues with bisexual communities' unrepresentativeness and sense of 'newness' continued from the 1980s into the twenty-first century. While the formation of organisations such as London and Edinburgh Bisexual Groups was very significant for some interviewees, for many others the development of these groups had no impact on their sense of bisexual 'community'.

In the next section I will focus on bisexuality and politics – firstly, the way the constructed dichotomy between the 'sexual' and the 'political' and the hyper-sexualisation of bisexuality inhibited the development of a coherent bisexual politics, and secondly the way that bisexuals attempted to respond to this problem by constructing a politics based on 'inclusivity' and 'acceptance'. However, these efforts struggled to contend with the paradox that, in being 'inclusive', bisexuals were also attempting to define themselves against – and thus, exclude – gay and (especially) lesbian politics.

Bisexual Politics

Bisexuality and Sex

Bisexuality and multiple-gender-attraction were often hyper-sexualised in discourses about sexual politics. The 'sexual' was also seen as mutually exclusive with, or even opposed to, 'the 'political'. In the homophile movement of the 1950s and 1960s, as discussed in Chapter One, the 'respectability' narrative of homophile 'inverts' was based on the marginalisation of primarily working-class 'perverts' who had sex with multiple genders.[94] In the debates about bisexuality and lesbianism in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, even the orthography constructed 'bi-sexual' as

[94] Houlbrook, *Queer London*, 196-197.

particularly sexual, using the hyphen to isolate 'sexual' and make it 'a question of numbers (the desire for two)'.[95] Crucially, this was juxtaposed to 'Lesbian', written with a capital L to denote an important, political identity.[96] The sexualisation of bisexuality therefore stood in direct contrast to political lesbian efforts to prioritise politics over sexual desire in relation to identity. If lesbian feminism was constructed by many in the 1970s and 1980s as being political largely *because* it was non-sexual, the sexualisation of bisexuality went hand-in-hand with conceptualisations of it as apolitical or politically regressive. This was due in part to constructions of non-monogamy and SM as linked to patriarchal power, and also because sexual acts in general were linked to the male gaze and upholding male priorities.

One way in which bisexuality was seen as dangerously sexual was through its relationship to SM. As discussed in the previous chapter, this was a particularly contentious issue in lesbian politics during the 1980s, and a dichotomous opposition was often constructed between most lesbian feminists on the one hand, and bisexuals (and some, 'sex-positive' lesbians) on the other. This dichotomy was reinforced by the ban of bisexuals and SM groups from London Lesbian and Gay Centre, as well as by the historical links between bisexuality and 'sexual liberation' groups in the 1970s discussed above. Sheila Jeffreys, in her lesbian feminist critique of bisexuality, also made these links: '1970s bisexuals saw themselves as sexual revolutionaries and were much involved in swinging, sex clubs and sadomasochism […] Here "bisexuality" consists solely of sexual acts'.[97] For the purposes of this chapter it is important to note not only that multiple-gender-attraction was linked to SM, but also that this was seen as evidence of bisexuality being apolitical at best – consisting 'solely of sexual acts' without attention to power differences – or, at worst, politically regressive and supportive of patriarchal violence against women.

Another aspect of the sexualisation of bisexuality and multiple-gender-attraction was the way it was linked to non-monogamy, which I will discuss in greater detail in Chapter Four. Lisa

---

[95] Hemmings, *Bisexual Spaces*, 74.
[96] Hemmings, *Bisexual Spaces*, 74.
[97] Jeffreys, *Bisexual Politics*, 274-275.

and Gwen both said in their interviews that 'active' bisexuality was assumed to mean that 'you were *actively* sexual with both sexes', and therefore could not be monogamous.[98] Gwen continued that she had trouble identifying as bisexual because she 'just wanted a loving monogamous relationship with somebody […] sexuality and sex, isn't actually… the main *driver*, in my life, it's been more *attachment*, and more about love'.[99] Implicit in this comment is also that bisexuals' non-monogamy was mainly driven by a focus on sexuality and sex, rather than attachment and love.

Non-monogamy was by no means exclusively associated with bisexuality and multiple-gender-attraction. Karin Wandrei points out that non-monogamy also occurred and was discussed amongst lesbians and gay men in the 1970s and 1980s, 'as a way to reject the patriarchal institution of monogamy'.[100] Jeffreys also acknowledges this: 'the issue of non-monogamy has been a contentious one within the lesbian feminist community and has been much […] experimented with'.[101] However, she argues that bisexual non-monogamy was *uniquely* problematic because of gendered power differences. Women in relationships with multiple genders were criticised for continuing to hold on to heterosexual privilege and allow the 'invasion' of men into relationships between women. Jeffreys states that 'the power relationship between bisexual women, who are still attached to men, and lesbians, is fraught by the heterosexual privilege bisexual women retain and the very different positions of structural power in the world which the male and female lovers of such women occupy'.[102] It is also noteworthy that Wandrei's article, on non-monogamy in the 2010s amongst women who had been involved with 1970s lesbian feminism, framed this non-monogamy as part of an 'ex-lesbian trajectory' or allowing women to 'expand on their initial identification of lesbians'.[103] Non-monogamy was

[98] Interview with Lisa, b. 1954, 4 April 2019.
[99] Interview with Gwen (pseudonym), b. 1951, 9 October 2018.
[100] Karin E. Wandrei. "'Sleeping with the Enemy': Non-monogamy and 1970s lesbian-feminists", *Sexualities* 22, no. 4 (2019): 493.
[101] Jeffreys, "Bisexual Politics", 280.
[102] Jeffreys, "Bisexual Politics", 280.
[103] Wandrei, "Sleeping with the Enemy", 496, 501.

therefore still portrayed as incompatible with late-twentieth-century lesbian feminism.

During the 1970s and 1980s, men in relationships with multiple genders were accused of exploiting their female partners because they had patriarchal power over them. They were also seen as exploiting (gay) male partners by prioritising their wives and traditional families. Both of these discourses can be seen, for instance, in the discourses about so-called 'mixed marriages'. 'Mixed marriages' was the term given in *Gay News* to marriages between partners with 'mixed' sexual orientations, and they were primarily discussed in terms of a marriage between a gay or bisexual man and a heterosexual woman. *Gay News* ran several articles on 'mixed marriages' during the 1970s, including interviews with married couples, analysis of the 'phenomenon', and anonymous personal testimony from partners on both sides. The men in these marriages were often portrayed, including in gay publications, as being selfish and domineering. 'Jane Smith' wrote in *Gay News* about how her gay husband took her for granted as a 'protective cover'.[104] Her husband had 'the gay "macho's" attitude that he has a god-given right to sex at any time', and ultimately even gave her a sexually-transmitted disease – before then telling her 'that it was a good thing I had it, as I would now have more sympathy with others'.[105] Although this article was published in 1977, before the advent of AIDS, the idea of non-monogamous men transmitting disease to 'innocent' heterosexual women also recurred during the AIDS crisis. Smith's article was published alongside one by Alison Hennegan of C.H.E., which was presumably intended to present the 'gay perspective'. Hennegan took particular care to acknowledge 'a frightening sense of isolation and near-terror' felt by straight wives, and stated that: 'Claims of the virtues of Self Expression and the individual's inalienable right to sexual freedom ring rather hollow in that context'.[106] Jeffreys also critiqued 'sexual freedom' as a means by which bisexual men could 'gain the compliance of their wives, retain their free labour in the home, and thus all the privileges of

[104] Jane Smith, "A Good Front", *Gay News*, March 1977, 18.
[105] Smith, "A Good Front", 17.
[106] Alison Hennegan, "Revelations, Recriminations, Rejection…", *Gay News*, March 1977, 18.

masculine heterosexual status, while still being able to access men for sexual excitement'.[107] Men in 'mixed marriages' were also criticised for neglecting their gay male partners, such as in this letter in *Gay News*, criticising the founder of the Married Gays Support Group:

> He seems to be saying that gays should put up with any amount of inconsideration, rudeness, insults and deceit from married men who want gay sex "on the side" […] broken appointments, secret communications, being snubbed on the street, miserliness, continual betrayal and general paranoia.[108]

Part of the sexualisation of multiple-gender-attraction involved the argument that it was inherently non-monogamous, and this non-monogamy was linked to selfishness and sexism.

As discussed above, the idea of bisexual men married to women as 'disease vectors' was not new, but it was seen as particularly threatening during the 1980s as a result of the AIDS epidemic. Bisexual men married to women were seen as more likely to transmit the virus from 'gay' to 'straight' populations, while bisexual women who had sex with men were believed to pose a threat to lesbians. Ian linked prejudice against bisexual people to 'the perceived non-monogamy issues. And in the past, you know, the "you're going to kill us all via AIDS", stuff'.[109] The link between multiple-gender-attraction and non-monogamy was also used to associate it with infidelity and an increased risk of AIDS transmission. The only English AIDS public health advertisement that explicitly discussed multiple-gender-attraction also linked AIDS transmission, multiple-gender-attraction and infidelity. It featured an image of two men holding hands and the caption: 'If a married man has an affair, it may not be with a woman'.[110]

The association between bisexuality and non-monogamy was often linked to the association between bisexuality and promiscuity, as Shiri Eisner describes:

> According to this stereotype, by virtue of having more than one gender preference, bisexuals are indiscriminate about their choice of partners and are therefore slutty or promiscuous. The idea of inherent unfaithfulness comes from the widely held belief that bisexuals are incapable of being satisfied with only one partner (since, evidently, they

---

[107] Jeffreys, "Bisexual Politics", 274.
[108] Ian Young, "Letter to the Editor: Preposterous Defence", *Gay News*, November 1976, 10.
[109] Interview with Ian, b. 1962, 7 May 2019.
[110] Health Education Authority advertisement, 1994/1995. Accessed via: https://collection.sciencemuseumgroup.org.uk/objects/co8227621/if-a-married-man-has-an-affair-it-may-not-be-with-a-woman-poster.

can't be satisfied with only one gender).[111]

Eisner argues that the modern 'mainstream bisexual movement' tries to rebut this stereotype, in a way that is 'personalised and literal' and also 'hearken[s] to the demand for normalcy', emphasising that 'many bisexual people have succeeded in maintaining happy, long-term, exclusive relationships for years'.[112]

Many of my interviewees also tried to refute the idea of bisexuality as promiscuous or inherently non-monogamous – Curtis said 'you can be bisexual and not hardly have sex *at all*, or *never* have sex. It's to do with your sexual attraction to people, it's not measuring your activity'.[113] Alison and Vera (b. 1960), who were both in non-monogamous relationships, were anxious not to let their relationships reinforce 'stereotypes' about bisexual promiscuity: 'To be *very* clear about it […] I'm not polyamorous because I'm bi'.[114] Interviewees were aware that their interviews would be archived and accessible to the public, and in these instances Alison and Vera seemed particularly conscious of the potential audience for these interviews. They may have been seeking to present a composed and 'positive' version of bisexuality to an imagined audience of potential critics, and were anxious to ensure that the interviews were not used to stigmatise bisexuality and multiple-gender-attraction.

Eisner argues that, instead of trying to 'rebut' stereotypes of bisexuality, bisexuals should instead 'examine why society places bisexuality on the side of anxiety, threat and subversion', and 'use these very things to disrupt social order and create social change'.[115] She suggests that the stereotype of bisexuality as promiscuous and antithetical to monogamy marks 'society's fear of sexuality […] Monogamy has been used historically and culturally as a capitalist and patriarchal tool'.[116] The sexualisation of bisexuality, she argues, 'can open a window to a different kind of

---

[111] Eisner, *Bi*, 38.
[112] Eisner, *Bi*, 40-41.
[113] Interview with Curtis (pseudonym), b. 1958, 24 July 2018.
[114] Interview with Alison (pseudonym), b. 1967, 5 October 2018; Interview with Vera (pseudonym), b. 1960, 8 November 2018.
[115] Eisner, *Bi*, 43.
[116] Eisner, *Bi*, 45.

sexual culture, encouraging sexual independence, exploration, and enjoyment of our bodies, our sexualities, our various genders, and our sexual interactions'.[117]

Eisner's argument is a self-proclaimed 'revolutionary' one, and my interviewee's anxiety about being seen as promiscuous or inherently non-monogamous indicates that most have not taken up her call to 'disrupt social order and create social change'.[118] This is a contrast to the 1970s, where bisexuals responded to criticism of their 'promiscuity' and political regressiveness with a reverse discourse that sought to portray bisexuals as *more* politically radical by virtue of their promiscuity, as I will discuss below.

Bisexuality and Politics

In the late 1970s, bisexuals and those attracted to multiple genders began to develop and assert their own politics. These politics were, perhaps understandably, often constructed defensively against the lesbian and gay politics that had excluded them, but this made the formation of a coherent political community particularly difficult.

Towards the end of the 1970s and into the 1980s, there were some efforts by bisexuals and those attracted to multiple genders to argue that they were *more* politically radical by virtue of their promiscuity. In contrast to the idea that the sexual behaviour of bisexuals made them more likely to be misogynistic or support the conservative institution of the family, it was argued that bisexuality challenged gender stereotypes because bisexuals did not 'discriminate' according to gender when choosing sexual partners.[119] A bisexual woman, Sue Spicer, wrote in *Gay News*:

> To my mind, bisexuality is in fact a far greater challenge to stereotyped sexual roles than simply being gay can ever be […] I cannot imagine any lovelier society than one in which everyone would joyfully and lovingly have sex with anyone else, regardless of sex, age, colour or any other arbitrary considerations.[120]

Bisexuality was described in *Linchpin*, the newsletter of Birmingham C.H.E., as 'non-

[117] Eisner, *Bi*, 45.
[118] Eisner, *Bi*, 43.
[119] Sue Spicer, "Minimising the Distinctions", *Gay News,* May 1976, 14.
[120] Spicer, "Minimising", 14.

discrimination of a high order!', while a pamphlet by a GLF member discussing 'Sexual Liberation' argued that 'the ultimate goal must be a new life-style, such as […] communal bisexuality'.[121]

This narrative turned the concept of bisexuality as a 'synthesis' of heterosexuality and homosexuality, used by gay liberationists to dismiss it, on its head – rather than signifying that bisexuals were 'partially straight', the 'bisexual middle ground' was reinterpreted as progressive and even superior.[122] This characterisation of multiple-gender-attraction and bisexuality could be seen as evidence that it was possible for bisexuality to be theorised as a political identity. However, they tended to come across as defensive: bisexuality was not simply a political identity, but was a 'far greater' challenge to sexism than being gay. It is this particular defensiveness and emphasis on sex and promiscuity that suggest this argument was the beginnings of a new 'reverse discourse' amongst those who were attracted to multiple genders. This 'reverse discourse' took the emphasis on bisexuality as particularly sexual, and argued that this type of sexuality was a good thing because it was politically subversive. This was different to the 'reverse discourse' used by homosexuals according to Foucault, because it responded to gay and lesbian politics, rather than sexological and medical investigations by heterosexuals.[123]

Jasbir Puar argues that late twentieth-century and early twenty-first century discourses about sexuality have been characterised by a form of 'homonationalism' – that is, the inclusion of certain 'acceptable' forms of homosexuality in a nationalist and imperialist project.[124] This inclusion is 'contingent upon the segregation and disqualification of racial and sexual others' – primarily people of colour, but also trans people and those who engage in more 'deviant', non-normative forms of sexual expression, such as sex work, SM, and non-monogamy.[125] In some ways, bisexuality and multiple-gender-attraction could also be seen as part of these 'segregated'

---

[121] Richard, "Bisexuality at Malvern", *Linchpin*, June 1974, 4; Jim, "Sexual Liberation" (flyer, undated, after 1972), LSE: HCA/GLF/3.
[122] Hemmings, *Bisexual Spaces*, 3.
[123] Foucault, *Sexuality Volume 1*, 101.
[124] Jasbir Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*, 2nd ed. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017), 2.
[125] Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages*, 2.

groups, and their exclusion in the late twentieth century a kind of pre-history for the contemporary homonationalism Puar describes. Certainly the hyper-sexualisation of bisexuality was used to exclude it from many lesbian, gay and heterosexual spaces. However, again this portrayal of bisexuality as an excluded 'other' to more 'mainstream' homonormative identities is overly-simplistic and ignores the myriad ways in which bisexual communities and politics also excluded people of colour and trans people, which I will discuss further below. Furthermore, the gay liberation politics and lesbian feminist politics discussed in the previous chapter were not the homonormative, homonationalist politics that Puar discusses. Rejection of the nuclear family, rejection of sex with men (and, sometimes, sex altogether) and efforts to fundamentally transform societal structures were also not incorporated into the nationalist project. Bisexuality and multiple-gender-attraction were not the apolitical or conservative identities which their critics in lesbian and gay organisations portrayed them as – but nor were they especially revolutionary and subversive. As I will discuss, my interviewees were generally left-wing, but their politics and attitude to sexual politics encompassed a wide range of perspectives. Rather than the prehistory of Puar's division between 'homonationalist' and 'disqualified other', the 1970s and 1980s demonstrate varying competing politics over sexuality that did not coalesce into any neat binaries.

The 'reverse discourse' of radical bisexuality during the 1970s was limited in its appeal; arguing that bisexuality was 'politically radical' would only have appealed to those already in favour of political radicalism. This would have limited any political identity group that formed as the result of this reverse discourse. The onset of the AIDS crisis and concerns about bisexuals as 'vectors' for the illness then made it particularly difficult to sustain an argument for the radical potential of promiscuity, as discussed above. The argument explicitly linking promiscuity and radical politics therefore faded in the early 1980s, before it had the chance to be politically influential.

From the 1980s onwards, as bisexual groups began to form in London, Edinburgh and

elsewhere, they also began to construct and assert a politics of bisexuality. The National Bisexual Conferences, which occurred annually from 1984, provided another means to work out a collective politics, and Ian said that they were particularly 'activist-y political' in their early years – the 1984 conference was entitled 'The Politics of Bisexuality', and the 1985 conference 'Bisexuality and the Politics of Sex'. This political focus became less pronounced over time – in 1986 there was the more vague title of 'Power / Image / Choice', and thereafter conferences were known simply as the 'National Bisexual Conference', or 'BiCon'.

A key theme of bisexual politics from the 1980s onwards was an emphasis on diversity and inclusivity. This point was stressed by Ian, who said that the negative experience that many bisexuals had of lesbian politics during the 'lesbian sex wars' had led to a desire to avoid 'gatekeeping'.[126] For example, there was a debate about trans inclusion at a Bisexual Conference in the early 1990s, leading to the decision 'to treat people the way they identify, without gatekeeping'.[127] Although that occurred in the 1990s, he argued that this desire for inclusivity had 'been there from the start', as a result of seeking to avoid 'a screaming match over who was allowed to be in it and who wasn't'.[128] Alison also commented, of the 'bisexual community', that 'there are binary and nonbinary trans people, there are agender people, there are aroace people, there are disabled bis, there are bis of colour – you name it, it's got all the diversity'.[129] Paula C. Rust also argues that an emphasis on diversity is a key theme of bisexual politics: 'A commonly expressed sentiment is that the bisexual community derives strength, and perhaps even unity, from its diversity'.[130]

However, these rhetorical invocations of bisexual communities' unity through diversity often allow bisexuals to leave their own prejudices and exclusions unexamined. For example, in

---

[126] Interview with Ian, b. 1962, 7 May 2019
[127] Interview with Ian, b. 1962, 7 May 2019.
[128] Interview with Ian, b. 1962, 7 May 2019.
[129] Interview with Alison (pseudonym), b. 1967, 5 October 2018. 'Aroace' here refers to aromantic and asexual people, who do not experience romantic or sexual attraction, respectively.
[130] Rust, *Bisexuality and Lesbian Politics*, 237.

relation to race, the 'bisexual community' is often described as 'uniquely positioned to provide a home for, and a parallel to, other mélanges', including of race.[131] Bisexual 'hybridity' supposedly provides a greater understanding of racial hybridity and multiculturalism. In *Bisexual* Horizons, June Jordan argues that not only are bisexuality and being mixed-race linked, but 'interracial or multiracial identity' was 'the analogy' for bisexuality.[132] Also in *Bisexual Horizons*, Yasmin Prabhudas links bisexuals and mixed-race people as 'Arbiters of Change', arguing that both have 'a positive role to play in bringing together the frequently very separately perceived realms of "gay" / "straight", "black" / "white"'.[133] This self-congratulatory argument is often too easily used by white bisexuals to avoid examining their own racism and the fact that bisexual groups in both the UK and the US are predominantly white spaces.[134] It is noteworthy that, even when asked about the composition of London and Edinburgh Bisexual Groups, interviewees did not mention the racial make-up of these groups. Kate's assertion that Edinburgh Bisexual Group was a 'very mixed group' was explained by references to gender and age, and Dave included discussion of class and 'sexuality background', but race was not discussed. Even as recently as 2020, BiCon has been criticised by bisexual people of colour for being 'structurally racist' and exclusionary.[135] Eisner argues that bisexuality itself is 'a white identity', and that bisexuals' references to multiculturalism are a form of 'wishful thinking that renders them "already inclusive"'.[136]

In relation to gender politics, I have already discussed some of the tensions over male dominance of bisexual organisations in the 1970s and early 1980s, and the increasing involvement of women from the mid-1980s. Feminism was a fraught topic in relation to this. Many bisexual activists were influenced by their experiences in lesbian and gay organisations in

---

[131] Hemmings, *Bisexual Spaces*, 189.
[132] June Jordan, "A New Politics of Sexuality", in *Bisexual Horizons: Politics, Histories, Lives,* ed. The Off Pink Collective (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1996), 14.
[133] Yasmin Prabhudas, "Bisexuals and People of Mixed Race: Arbiters of Change", in *Bisexual Horizons: Politics, Histories, Lives,* ed. The Off Pink Collective (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1996), 30.
[134] Hemmings, *Bisexual Spaces*, 190.
[135] Nila K., Jacq and J., "BiCon lets down People of Colour. Again…", *Bi's of Colour* blog, 15 June 2020, https://bisofcolour.home.blog/2020/06/15/bicon-lets-down-people-of-colour-again/.
[136] Eisner, *Bi*, 278-279.

the negative sense – that is, deliberately seeking to do things differently. Members of bisexual groups during the 1980s therefore sought to establish a 'bisexual feminism' which was distinct from the lesbian feminism that had excluded them. Rust contrasts bisexual 'inclusion' and sex positivity to lesbian feminist approaches: 'The celebration of sexual diversity is reflected in the pervasiveness of sex-positive or sex-radical philosophies which eschew political constraints on sexuality in favour of sexual open-mindedness'.[137] Although Ian presented efforts to avoid the 'gatekeeping' of identities associated with lesbian feminism as leading to *inclusion*, doing so obviously entailed the *exclusion* of their conceptualisation of 'lesbian feminism'.[138] This also aligns with Hemmings' findings in the US. She states that the 1990 conference organisers were at such pains to distinguish their 'bisexual feminism' from 'lesbian feminism' that they structured their debates in such a way that 'even to suggest that sexism affects women and men differently […] is to invite a scorn generally reserved for the demon lesbian separatists of the bisexual imagination'.[139] Bisexual women could also end up re-inscribing the sexual / political binary in order to assert a bisexual feminism, as an unnamed bisexual woman said: 'The men I met [at a 1987 bisexual conference] all indicated sympathy for feminism, but I suspect some were motivated to come by sexual adventurism'.[140] 'Sexual adventurism' and sympathy for feminism were thus seen as mutually exclusive, and bisexual feminist women were cast as 'political', while bisexual men were 'sexual', and thus apolitical.

Although bisexual groups and the National Bisexual Conferences seem to have prided themselves on their 'inclusion' and 'diversity', unlike 'other gay groups', their ambiguous position in relation to gay and lesbian communities demonstrates that efforts to avoid 'gatekeeping' were often more in rhetoric than in practice. Bisexual communities were heavily influenced by gay and lesbian communities, but also sought to define themselves against these groups, in a way which

[137] Rust, *Bisexuality and Lesbian Politics*, 236.
[138] Interview with Ian, b. 1962, 7 May 2019.
[139] Hemmings, *Bisexual Spaces*, 188.
[140] Unnamed woman quoted in Hemmings, *Bisexual Spaces*, 184.

made it unclear whether they saw themselves as part of the 'gay and lesbian' or 'wider LGBT' community, or independent from it.

These practical conflicts over race and gender in bisexual politics highlight some of the flaws with the rhetoric of bisexual diversity and inclusion. This politics was, in practice, vague and ambivalent, and too often deflected questions about creating a 'concrete bisexual space' by differentiating bisexuality from other forms of sexuality.[141] This ambivalence can also be linked to the lack of clear definition of 'bisexual' discussed in the Introduction: 'In other words, bisexuals are a diverse group with no single quality in common'.[142] Interviewees also expressed similar sentiments: Ian said that 'you cannot ask a question of the bisexual community around identity by having tick boxes. You have to let them fill it in', while Alison similarly said that identifying with several different labels: 'within [bisexual] circles it shows – other people that it's – it's okay, to choose your own label […] And I think – that can only be a positive thing, really'.[143] However, this lack of clear definition made advocating for bisexual rights on the basis of a political group identity extremely difficult. When required to define 'bisexual communities' or 'bisexual politics', these discourses often focussed solely on defining bisexuality in opposition to lesbian, gay and straight communities, rather than establishing an independent rationale.

Beyond the specific politics of bisexuality, it is also important to analyse interviewees' wider political beliefs. In these, interviewees were generally not 'representative'. They overwhelmingly aligned themselves with left-wing beliefs. Both Ossian and Kate had been involved with the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) during the 1970s and 1980s, which Kate said was 'because [the CPGB] were very into, erm – sexual politics, at least, the student branch was'.[144] Louise had been involved with the Revolutionary Communist Party after leaving school, and Vera had been in the Labour Party as a teenager, and raised by parents who were

[141] Hemmings, *Bisexual Spaces*, 165.
[142] Rust, *Bisexuality and Lesbian Politics*, 234.
[143] Interview with Ian, b. 1962, 7 May 2019; Interview with Alison (pseudonym), b. 1967, 5 October 2018.
[144] Interview with Kate, b. 1960, 31 August 2019.

'both very active […] lefties, basically'.[145] Although not all interviewees were as explicit as Kate in linking party politics to sexual politics, it does appear that their sexual politics affected politics in other areas. Left-wing politics were frequently explained through reference to Thatcher, and especially Thatcher's policies on sexuality – primarily Section 28 and the response to the AIDS crisis. Gwen said that she and her friends in the 1980s 'despised and detested' the Thatcherite government, and Curtis, who was a Liberal and critical of the 'naivety' of the left, also acknowledged that during the 1980s 'the right were quite homophobic' and 'it was very rare to find anybody in the Conservative Party who [was] remotely… supportive of, liberation'.[146] Nor was this broadly left-wing politics solely a product of youthfulness or the specific context of the 1970s and 1980s. Although interviewees were generally no longer involved with CPBG or the Revolutionary Communist Party, many still linked themselves to Labour, the Scottish National Party or the Liberal Democrats.

I will discuss the links between sexuality and popular memory in greater detail in Chapter Five. For now, it is important to note that a 'bisexual politics' was not always, for interviewees, tied to specifically bisexual organisations. A 'bisexual politics' could also involve a broader left-wing, anti-conservative stance, influenced by sexual identity and popular memory. In this broader form of politics, bisexuality and multiple-gender-attraction was less focussed on rejecting gay liberation and lesbian feminism, and was instead aligned with them in opposition to homophobic governments.

Bisexuality and attraction to multiple genders was frequently cast as apolitical or politically-regressive, in large part due to an emphasis on it as a *sexual* identity, which highlighted links between bisexuality, non-monogamy, infidelity, sexual liberation and SM. In the 1950s and 1960s, this was perceived as threatening to the 'respectability' narrative of homophile 'inverts'.

---

[145] Interview with Louise, b. 1966, 27 July 2018; Interview with Vera (pseudonym), b. 1960, 26 October 2018.
[146] Interview with Gwen (pseudonym), b. 1951, 9 October 2018; Interview with Curtis (pseudonym), b. 1958, 24 July 2018.

In the 1970s and 1980s, bisexuals were seen as sexist, potential vectors of AIDS transmission, and threatening to lesbian feminists in particular. Efforts to assert a 'bisexual politics' were shaped by this context. Initially, this focussed on re-imagining bisexuals as more politically progressive by virtue of their 'promiscuity'. From the mid-1980s onwards, the focus shifted to a vague language of 'inclusiveness' and 'diversity'. However, this politics was not 'independent' of gay and lesbian politics, but constantly responding to it. The paradoxical efforts to exclude lesbian 'gatekeeping', while at the same time emphasising 'inclusiveness', rendered bisexual politics vague and chimeric.

Conclusion

During the 1970s, there was no independent bisexual community, and by the 1980s a range of bisexual organisations, publications and conferences had developed. This change seems to have had an inverse relationship to the inclusion of bisexuals and those attracted to multiple genders in lesbian and gay communities. While there was a certain degree of tolerance by some moderate gay liberation groups in the first half of the 1970s, this declined after C.H.E. became more overtly politicised in the mid-1970s, and culminated in the short-lived but symbolically significant decision to ban bisexual organisations from the London Lesbian and Gay Centre in 1985. It seems likely that these two trends exacerbated one another – as bisexuals began to organise separately there was an increasing sense that they were not lesbian or gay, and as exclusion from lesbian and gay communities increased bisexuals arguably felt a greater desire to differentiate themselves from what they experienced as 'gate keeping'.

However, these broad narratives obscure several complexities. For example, although multiple-gender-attraction and 'polymorphous perversity' were embraced by GLF according to some of my interviewees, the criticism of 'straight' conservatism and misogyny excluded bisexuals whose identities were seen as a 'synthesis' of heterosexual and homosexual. Although bisexual women were often excluded by primarily lesbian efforts to establish a binary of 'political' and 'sexual', some bisexual women also used this binary against bisexual men, to portray

themselves as political bisexual feminists and bisexual men as problematically sexual. Furthermore, there were also significant continuities over time. As discussed in the Introduction, ideas about universal bisexuality, which mitigated against the development of an independent bisexual community in the 1970s, were still embraced by some of my interviewees in the twenty-first century – primarily those interviewees who continued to feel that a bisexual community did not exist, or who were alienated from it. 'Sexual freedom' narratives, pornography and SM were linked to bisexuality throughout the 1970s and 1980s, and into the twenty-first century.

The limited relevance of bisexual organisations to many of my interviewees raises the question of whether their development in the 1980s was particularly important to most people who were attracted to multiple genders, or to their sense of community. The lack of clear definition of bisexual politics meant that some interviewees – such as Ian and Alison – were particularly involved in and enthusiastic about bisexual communities in the twenty-first century, whereas others – including a majority of my interviewees – did not recognise their existence at all.

PART TWO

Bisexual Stories

Chapter Three

Coming Out

The narratives of identity and 'outness' told by bisexuals and people attracted to multiple genders frequently and significantly differed from mainstream 'coming out stories' – both in the 1970s and 1980s, and in the present-day context of my interviews. Many of those who were attracted to multiple genders resisted the 'disclosure imperative' to 'come out' – framing it as unnecessary or harmful, or emphasising the importance of privacy. Others resisted the essentialism of 'coming out' narratives that focussed on discovering an inherent 'truth', by highlighting instead the fluid or chosen nature of their identities. The lack of coherent community discussed in Chapters One and Two also meant that bisexual 'coming out stories' did not have the same neat resolution as mainstream gay and lesbian narratives. In this chapter I explore these alternative 'coming out stories', as well as potential reasons behind them, which included visibility, relationships, identities and gender.

'Coming out', and its presumed antithesis, remaining 'in the closet', have been key features of gay narratives for decades – what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick describes as the 'gravest and most magnetic' figures of homosexuality since the end of the nineteenth century.[1] However, both concepts are historically-contingent and comparatively recent. In *Gay New York*, George Chauncey discusses the different meanings of 'coming out', and how they shifted over time.[2] In the 1920s, he argues, 'coming out' referred to being initiated into the 'gay world', and was not a solitary experience. This was a play on the concept of debutantes 'coming out', and initially it specifically referred to men being formally 'presented' to drag balls.[3] Over time, Chauncey argues, the meaning shifted to include a first homosexual experience and 'realisation' of same-sex attraction, and by the 1970s 'coming out' primarily referred to 'announcing homosexuality to straight friends

---

[1] Eve Kosofsky Segwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2008), 71.
[2] Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 6-8.
[3] Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 7.

and family' – that is, to a straight audience rather than a gay one.[4] In the British gay and bisexual press of the 1970s and 1980s, this latter meaning was the one most focussed on, but there was also a continuation of earlier meanings – especially 'realisation' of same-sex attraction, which was sometimes referred to as 'coming out to myself'. Although straight people were presumed to be the primary audience when 'coming out' to others, there was also a significant amount of emphasis on the gay community and how 'coming out' would strengthen it. One interviewee, Ossian (b. 1954), referred in the same discussion to 'announcing' his sexuality to his family, *and* the earlier ideas about debutantes: 'I came out to my mum, first […] Coming out is er… a ritual that the upper-classes have. Princess Diana came out. Know – do you know that ritual that they do? […] That's what coming out is'.[5]

The idea of being 'in the closet', to refer to the decision not to 'come out', was not used by gay people before the 1960s.[6] The terms more frequently used before that period include living a 'double life', or wearing a 'mask'.[7] As Chauncey argues, rather than the isolating image of 'the closet', these older terms suggest movement between 'different personas and different lives', which often gave men a sense of freedom rather than isolation and constraint.[8] Some men positively enjoyed having an extensive 'secret life', and '"passing" as straight (and sometimes married) allowed them to have jobs and status while still participating in homosexual society'.[9] Deborah Cohen also points out that in the first half of the twentieth century non-disclosure was often associated, not with secrecy or duplicitousness, but with a reasonable desire to maintain 'privacy'.[10] Non-disclosure, leading a 'double life', or remaining 'closeted' was not stigmatised as a sign of internalised repression, provoking sympathy or criticism, until the mid-twentieth century. 'Coming out', particularly to the wider heterosexual world, was 'something that only

[4] Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 8.
[5] Interview with Ossian (pseudonym), b. 1954, 13 August 2018.
[6] Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 6.
[7] Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 6.
[8] Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 6.
[9] Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 7.
[10] Cohen, *Family Secrets*, 145-146.

middle-class inverts did' until the early 1950s, and even then it was relatively rare.[11]

During the 1950s and 1960s, however, as these 'inverts' increasingly sought to present a 'respectable' narrative of their identity, maintaining a 'double life' was increasingly criticised. These criticisms focussed in particular on men who were attracted to more than one gender – described by sexologists as 'perverts' – who could more easily 'move between' heterosexuality and homosexuality, generally without identifying themselves as anything other than 'normal' and thus feeling no need to 'come out'.[12] As such, multiple-gender-attraction was linked to a reluctance or refusal to 'come out' – even if someone *was* in fact 'out' as bisexual. This continued as language changed to focus more on 'the closet' and 'closetedness', and 'coming out' was increasingly seen as an important political strategy for liberation. Bisexuals, especially bisexual men, were seen as 'not prepared to forward the struggle' – again, whether they were open about how they identified or not.[13] This was linked to their exclusion from gay and lesbian groups, as discussed in Chapter One.

Ken Plummer describes gay and lesbian 'coming out stories' as 'modernist tales', which featured causal language, linear progression, and a sense of 'discovering a "truth"'.[14] Plummer's work was influenced by life-history interviews, conducted in the late 1970s with 'people who perceived themselves as sexually different'.[15] As a result of the context of these interviews, and Plummer's own politics, his work was closely tied up with the political narratives that were central to the gay liberation movement. The 'linear progression' of 'coming out stories' was generally from an unhappy childhood to a moment of discovery, until 'problems are resolved in some fashion, usually through meeting other lesbians or gays in a community'.[16] 'Community' also fed into 'coming out stories' and was strengthened by the stories: 'for narratives to flourish there

---

[11] Cohen, *Family Secrets*, 145-146.
[12] Houlbrook, *Queer London*, 196-197, 11.
[13] Alan Louis, "Letter to the Editor: Futile Relationships", *Gay News*, December 1974, 23.
[14] Plummer, *Telling Sexual Stories*, 83.
[15] Plummer, *Telling Sexual Stories*, ix, 9.
[16] Plummer, *Telling Sexual Stories*, 83.

must be a community to hear […] for communities to hear, there must be stories which weave together their history, their identity, their politics'.[17] However, as shown in the previous section, discovering a 'community' after 'coming out' was less simple for bisexuals and those attracted to multiple genders. As I will argue in this chapter, other aspects of mainstream 'coming out stories' – such as the linear narrative progression, or the essentialism of a 'true' and stable identity – were also less straightforwardly applicable to multiple-gender-attraction.

Ossian argued that 'coming out' was an unhelpful and 'disempowering' experience.[18] In this respect, he was similar to many of the other men that I interviewed. In this chapter I will begin by analysing the 'coming out stories' prevalent in the British gay press and the publications of gay liberation groups, the attitudes expressed towards bisexuality and the closet, and 'coming out stories' in more recent years. The second half of the chapter will focus on the discussions of 'coming out' in my own oral history interviews, the Hall-Carpenter Archives Oral History Project interviews, and the interview excerpts and autobiographies included in Charlotte Wolff's *Bisexuality: A Study*.[19] In general, the latter set of sources demonstrated a greater range of attitudes to 'coming out', and male interviewees in particular expressed more negative or ambivalent feelings about the concept and process of what they understood 'coming out' to mean.

This difference was not primarily the result of a difference between 'written' or 'published' sources and more 'unmediated' or 'personal' oral histories – the interview excerpts that Wolff included were 'much shortened versions', and the priorities and perspectives of different interviewers mean that oral histories should not be seen as 'unmediated' in any way. Some of the 'coming out stories' published in *Gay News* or *C.H.E. Bulletin* could also be seen as 'personal' autobiographical narratives, and so the distinctions between the forms of the sources cannot be the key explanation for the differences in the 'coming out stories'. Plummer argues that the dominance of mainstream 'coming out stories' began to change in the 1980s and 1990s, but

[17] Plummer, *Telling Sexual Stories*, 87.
[18] Interview with Ossian (pseudonym), b. 1954, 13 August 2018.
[19] The British Library: HCA Oral History Project, 1985 – 1999, C456. Wolff, *Bisexuality*.

the differences between the two sets of sources were *not* primarily the result of a change in attitudes over time, as the range of time periods covered will demonstrate. There was a subtle shift in the emphasis on 'coming out' in the twenty-first century, but this was more in terms of the rhetorical inclusion of caveats – 'no one should ever feel pressured' – rather than a fundamental change in attitudes.[20] Bisexual people and those attracted to multiple genders resisted the 'disclosure imperative' in the 1970s and 1980s, as well as today. There was not a singular 'bisexual coming out narrative' that replaced the 'gay and lesbian' mainstream narrative Plummer describes, but multiple narratives refracted through the lens of gender, class, race and age. Some people who were attracted to multiple genders but did not identify as bisexual also problematised conventional 'coming out' narratives, through a non-linear or political approach to identity that could not be seen as the expression of an inner 'essence'. What is clear, however, is that interviewees attracted to multiple genders told very different 'coming out stories' from mainstream gay and lesbian narratives.

Coming Out Stories

Gay and Lesbian 'Coming Out Stories' in the 1970s and 1980s

In their introductory flyer 'What is GLF', published in the early 1970s, GLF defined 'coming out' as 'to be liberated: to be open and candid about our gayness'.[21] They acknowledged that 'coming out' 'isn't easy', but emphasised that 'IT MUST BE DONE for our own sake and that of our fellow gays'.[22] 'Coming out' was the first pillar of GLF's political theory, as articulated by Jeffrey Weeks.[23] However, it was not seen as just a matter of individual disclosure. The second pillar of GLF's political theory was 'coming together' to create a gay community with political power.[24] This was linked to 'coming out' because being 'liberated' was believed to enable gay

[20] Wayne Dhesi, "National Coming Out Day 2018", *Stonewall.org.uk*, 10 Oct 2018, https://www.stonewall.org.uk/our-work/blog/national-coming-out-day-2018.
[21] GLF, *What is GLF* (Introductory flyer, undated, c. 1972), 3, LSE: HCA/CHE/12/15.
[22] GLF, *What is GLF*, 3. Emphasis in source.
[23] Weeks, *Coming Out*, 191.
[24] Weeks, *Coming Out*, 191.

people to work together openly and engage in political action without worrying about discovery – as Cohen puts it, privacy was increasingly seen as a 'personality-deforming exile' from the mid-twentieth century, and 'since silence enforced privacy, the vehicle of liberation would be talk'.[25] In addition, it was believed that 'coming out' would reveal to straight society the large numbers of people who were gay, and therefore the need to take them seriously: 'There are several million of us in the UK. We are a powerful constituency. And we must make ourselves heard'.[26]

The necessity of 'coming out' was most stridently expressed during the 1970s by radical gay liberationist groups such as GLF, but more moderate groups such as C.H.E. also argued for its importance. For example, in C.H.E.'s 'Report of the Gay Lifestyle Commission' (1973), the authors acknowledged that 'we must not imagine that by "coming out" we can eliminate prejudice "at a stroke"', but nevertheless argued that 'it is up to each one of us to seize the opportunity of making it known that we're gay, as well as living openly and honestly in our everyday lives'.[27] Generally, more radical voices within C.H.E. were keener advocates of 'coming out'. The 'C.H.E. Activists' group proposed in 1974 was documented by an Activist Register that was to be shared with all C.H.E. groups, and therefore it was argued that: 'To be an activist requires that you are committed to C.H.E.'s aims and able to spend time and energy working for them […] you must be prepared to "come out", i.e. it's pointless joining the register if you have any qualms about being known openly as gay'.[28] The authors of the paper proposing the Activists group did acknowledge that 'this doesn't mean that because you are not fully "out", you are barred from working in activist schemes or from helping to campaign', and that members who felt unable to join the Activists because 'they haven't yet come out […] must not be alienated. Their position should be respected'.[29] However, even the acknowledgment that these members 'haven't *yet* come out' suggests that to 'come out' was seen as the goal towards which all politically-active members

[25] Cohen, *Family Secrets*, 231.
[26] GLF, *What is GLF*, 3.
[27] C.H.E., "Report of the Gay Lifestyle Commission" (Report of the Gay Lifestyle Commission at C.H.E. Conference, Morecambe, 7 April 1973), 1, LSE: HCA/CHE/8/2.
[28] Naughton et al, "C.H.E. Structure", 5.
[29] Naughton et al, "C.H.E. Structure", 5-6.

should be working – the paper added that 'coming out' was the 'baseline' necessary for 'effective campaigning'.[30]

The exhortations to 'come out' had not abated in the 1980s. An article in *Gay News* written by Roger Baker, C.H.E.'s London Organiser and a more radical voice within the Campaign – the same Roger Baker who critically reviewed Colin MacInnes's *Bisexuality: A Study* as discussed in Chapter One – responded defensively to criticism of 'coming out'.[31] Baker portrayed 'coming out' as inseparable from gay liberation, suggesting that criticisms of 'coming out' and criticisms of gay liberation were one and the same: 'During the last ten years I have heard hundreds of voices braying their opposition to gay liberation, passionate in their ridicule and scorn for those who come out […] the gay movement gave us the confidence to materialise'.[32] Another article in 1982 entitled 'Proud and Out' emphasised the importance of taking part in Pride marches: 'Your open, unashamed display of gay sexuality proves to straights that gays exist and are here to stay', while another section specifically encouraged lesbians to participate because 'you might help to change society's attitudes towards us'.[33] There was slightly more emphasis on the individual as well as collective benefits of 'coming out': Baker argued that 'Personal oppression […] can only be confronted by the individual, and Coming Out is one way of doing this'.[34] Graham Pyper in the 'Proud and Out' article even stated that 'the first and foremost reason for going on a Gay Pride March' was 'the benefit to yourself!'.[35] However, this was a subtle shift rather than a pronounced change, and 'community' was still emphasised in lots of ways: 'public coming out is probably the most important political statement any of us could make. The coming out of a million people would have to affect another twenty million'.[36]

---

[30] Naughton et al, "C.H.E. Structure", 5. Emphasis mine.
[31] Roger Baker, "The Closet – A Fine and Private Place", *Gay News,* October – November 1980, 15.
[32] Baker, "The Closet", 15.
[33] Graham Pyper, "Proud and Out", *Gay News,* June 1982, 16; Amanda Russell, "Proud and Out", *Gay News,* June 1982, 16.
[34] Baker, "The Closet", 15.
[35] Pyper, "Proud and Out", 16.
[36] David Rothenberg, "Letters from America – Coming Out vs The Lunatic Fringe", *Gay News,* April 1981, 23.

In addition to the publications and pronouncements of the gay liberation movement, studies of 'coming out' also began to emerge from traditional academia, and proliferated in the late twentieth century. Gay liberationists themselves were also involved in academia – most obviously, Weeks, a founding member of GLF as well as a sociologist and historian. His history of homosexual politics was titled *Coming Out*, and in it he discussed the link between 'coming out' and 'coming together' that was an essential part of GLF's philosophy.[37] C.H.E.'s publications on 'coming out' were also in the form of reports, studies, or papers, lending them an air of academic authority, such as the 'Report of the Gay Lifestyle Commission'.[38] But the perpetuation of conventional 'coming out' narratives was not just confined to those involved in gay and lesbian organisations. Sociological and psychological studies also began to encourage progression along linear models of 'coming out' in order to enable gay and lesbian people to achieve 'identity synthesis', which made these conventional 'coming out stories' even more hegemonic.

In 1979 Vivienne C. Cass, an Australian psychologist, published her 'Homosexual Identity Model'.[39] Cass's model had international influence and was described as 'the driving force for research on coming out in virtually all social scientific disciplines'.[40] The model consisted of six stages, depicting a progressive development from 'Identity Confusion' to 'Identity Synthesis'.[41] Cass linked linear progress through these stages – particularly moving from 'Identity Tolerance' to 'Identity Acceptance' and 'Identity Pride' – to the psychological subject making connections with other lesbian and gay people. In this, Cass was clearly influenced by gay liberationists. She argued that these 'positive contacts' would make 'other homosexuals appear more significant and more favourable', with the result that eventually: 'Commitment to the gay group [will be] strong, generating a sense of group identity ("These are *my* people") and belonging'.[42] The sense of

---

[37] Weeks, *Coming Out*, 191.
[38] C.H.E., "Gay Lifestyle Commission", 1.
[39] Vivienne C. Cass, "Homosexual Identity Formation: A Theoretical Model", *Journal of Homosexuality* 4, no. 3 (1979): 219 – 235.
[40] Jimmie Manning, "Communicating Sexual Identities: A Typology of Coming Out", *Sexuality & Culture* 19 (2015): 123.
[41] Cass, "Homosexual Identity Formation", 222-235.
[42] Cass, "Homosexual Identity Formation", 230-233.

belonging and group identity was evidenced by gay liberation slogans such as 'gay is good' and 'gay and proud', and Cass also referred to the rejection of 'heterosexual values' such as marriage and 'sex-role structures' as further examples of this.[43] In contrast to gay liberationists' analysis of 'coming out', however, she argued that this 'pride' should not be the final stage, but one that would ideally be followed by 'an awareness that the "them and us" philosophy […] no longer holds true', and thus overall 'Identity Synthesis'.[44] Her work was therefore not fully in line with gay liberationist understandings of 'coming out', but it lent academic legitimacy to the linear narratives and emphasis on community.

In the 1980s and 1990s, other social scientists expanded on Cass's model. For example, Richard R. Troiden, an American sociologist writing in the 1980s, argued that 'coming out' was not linear, and instead followed a 'horizontal spiral' where 'progress through the stages occurs in back-and-forth, up-and-down ways'.[45] However, he used the same essential stages, and his description of 'progress through' these stages suggests that he was still heavily influenced by Cass's approach. In the 1990s, Anthony R. D'Augelli, an American psychologist, focussed on a 'life span' approach, which acknowledged 'interindividual differences' and again emphasised the importance of 'developing a lesbian-gay-bisexual social identity' and 'entering a lesbian-gay-bisexual community' amongst the stages.[46] D'Augelli named 'bisexuals' in his analysis, signalling a shift from earlier discussions, but the inclusion did not influence his overall approach and thus appears to have been mostly linguistic.

On the whole, therefore, social scientists following Cass's approach perpetuated the idea of 'coming out' as a series of psychological stages. Although they differed from gay liberationists to an extent, largely due to their intended audience of therapists and counsellors who could help

---

[43] Cass, "Homosexual Identity Formation", 233.
[44] Cass, "Homosexual Identity Formation", 234.
[45] Richard R. Troiden, "The Formation of Homosexual Identities", *Journal of Homosexuality* 17, no. 1-2 (1989): 47.
[46] Anthony R. D'Augelli, "Identity Development and Sexual Orientation: Toward a model of lesbian, gay and bisexual development", in *Human Diversity: Perspectives on people in context*, ed. E. J. Trickett, R. J. Watts and D. Birman (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1994), 326-327.

individual clients teleologically progress towards 'identity synthesis', they nevertheless emphasised the importance of 'community' in facilitating this.

Published narratives of gay and lesbian identities in the late twentieth century – in the gay press, the publications of gay liberation organisations, and psychological and sociological research on sexuality – therefore repeatedly stressed the importance of 'coming out'. It was argued that 'coming out' would bring both individual and collective liberation. Given the central importance that 'coming out' was afforded by gay men and lesbians in the late twentieth century, it is perhaps unsurprising that its antithesis, remaining 'in the closet', was so castigated.

The Closet and Bisexuality in the 1970s and 1980s

As well as stressing the importance of 'coming out', much of the gay and lesbian writing in this period also concerned itself with rebutting arguments for remaining 'closeted'. As multiple-gender-attraction and bisexuality were often linked to being 'closeted', a lot of this writing also involved explicitly or implicitly criticising those who were attracted to multiple genders for being 'cowardly' or 'duplicitous'.

In addition to his writing for *Gay News*, Baker also wrote a discussion paper about a 'Gay Lifestyle', which was presented to the Gay Lifestyle Commission at C.H.E.'s 1973 Conference.[47] This dismissed the argument that sexuality 'is of no concern to anyone else' or 'what I do in bed is my own business and no-one else's', stating that 'none of these (and other, similar) statements is true'.[48] He continued that 'to hide, or evade the issue, is a betrayal, and such an attitude has no place in a politically-oriented gay organisation'.[49] One of my interviewees, Gwen (b. 1951), who had been involved in C.H.E. during the 1970s, echoed these ideas:

> To me… coming out was about – was a political act, was an important political act, because if everybody came out, erm, the […] level of prejudice, hostility and oppression, and er - legal, and other, erm, forms of... discrimination, couldn't exist. Couldn't possibly exist. And

[47] Roger Baker, "Is there a Gay Lifestyle?" (Paper presented to the Gay Lifestyle Commission at C.H.E. Conference, Morecambe, 7 April 1973), LSE: HCA/CHE/8/2.
[48] Baker, "Gay Lifestyle", 1973 discussion paper, 4.
[49] Baker, "Gay Lifestyle", 1973 discussion paper, 5.

it's only because people pass as straight, that that's - that's been allowed to happen.[50]

To *not* come out, therefore, was a 'betrayal', and those who were 'in the closet' were not only failing to be 'politically-oriented', but also to blame for discrimination.

In his 1980 *Gay News* article, Baker reiterated his criticism of the arguments against 'coming out': 'I have never come across one convincing argument for staying in the closet'.[51] Like other writings in the 1980s, this article focussed slightly more on the personal rather than collective disadvantages of staying in the closet: it 'forces a gradual distortion of the personality' and is akin to 'being half-alive'.[52] Baker mused that 'the term "closet" is a good one, a powerful image of the dark, unventilated corridors of the world in which so many gays claim they prefer to live. Coffins of the spirit'.[53]

In most cases where people expressed negative feelings about 'coming out' they were portrayed unfavourably, and as politically 'regressive' or cowardly. For example, in 1984 *HIM Gay Reporter* interviewed Simon Napier-Bell, manager of Wham!, who said that he didn't think anyone should 'announce their sexuality'.[54] Napier-Bell was not directly criticised in the article, but he was quoted as describing gay militancy and women's liberation as 'sickening', and stating that 'in terms of homosexuality, the situation was much more correct and sane twenty years ago, before it was legalised and talked about' – sentiments which the interviewer could safely presume most of *HIM*'s readership would find offensive and outdated.[55] In other cases, those who resisted 'coming out' were patronised or mocked. Baker responded to two letter-writers who questioned the importance of 'coming out' by speculating: 'Actually, when you get down to it, what they're both really after are private saunas where they can have group sex – but we'll let that pass'.[56] The

[50] Interview with Gwen (pseudonym), b. 1951, 9 October 2018.
[51] Baker, "The Closet", 15.
[52] Baker, "The Closet", 15-16.
[53] Baker, "The Closet", 16.
[54] Andrew Panayi, "Sixties Survivor: Interview with Simon Napier-Bell", *HIM Gay Reporter*, January 1984, 42.
[55] Panayi, "Sixties Survivor", 42.
[56] Baker, "The Closet", 15.

assumed dichotomy between the 'sexual' and the 'political' discussed in Chapters One and Two can be seen here, in the suggestion that the letter writers' perceived political 'regressiveness' was linked to a hidden, shameful desire for group sex.

Discourses about bisexuality in the 1970s and 1980s repeatedly linked it to being 'closeted'. Napier-Bell in his interview talked about 'pop stars who would have said, years and years ago that they were absolutely normal', who 'now say they are bisexual when, in actual fact, they might be homosexual but I think that's a leeway you have to allow them'.[57] This view was also expressed in the 1970s: in a 1975 article in *Gay News*, part of a series detailing 'coming out stories', Kit Fletcher referred to an earlier article he had written about bisexuality. Although he had not described himself as bisexual, Fletcher argued that 'simply by writing on a subject like bisexuality, I was trying to keep my options open […] I was falling victim to that vicious straight / sexist conditioning […] in my own mind I was still in the closet'.[58] A letter to *Gay News* in 1974 argued that, based on the writer's 'experience of the bisexual male', men who described themselves as bisexual were 'not prepared to forward the struggle by emerging from [their] cosy closet'.[59] In our interview in 2018, Gwen also highlighted this argument, although she focussed her criticism on people she saw as not 'really' bisexual, rather than disputing the concept of bisexuality in general:

> I felt that... there were quite a few people sort of... not willing to admit they were gay, and so they say they're bisexual […] you know, I've met so many people who *aren't*, in fact, bisexual, but were - were actually in the closet, and... you know, had to kind of, erm... find a reason for going off and having gay sex when they were already married to a woman, for example.[60]

For Gwen, the importance of 'coming out' was also linked to her feelings about 'gay' and 'lesbian' as political identities, in implicit contrast to bisexuality which 'mudd[ied] the water'. Like the *Gay News* letter-writer, Gwen referred to the 'gay struggle' which bisexuals were not supporting: 'it was our, sort of, it was our duty to come out [*laughs briefly*] really. So I didn't want to kind of -

---

[57] Panayi, "Sixties Survivor", 42.
[58] Kit Fletcher, "Coming Out", *Gay News*, September 1975, 10.
[59] Louis, "Futile Relationships", 23.
[60] Interview with Gwen (pseudonym), b. 1951, 9 October 2018.

muddy the water by saying "well I'm not, sort of, completely lesbian", you know. It just seemed like, erm... a weaselly way of kind of not being in the gay struggle. So - I didn't. I just said I was gay'.[61]

The statements above demonstrate a hostility that was both gendered and generational. The *Gay News* letter-writer referred specifically to 'bisexual males', and although Gwen did not explicitly refer to men, her description of 'going off and having gay sex when they were already married to a woman' indicates that she was focussing her critique on men who were in 'mixed marriages' – that is, marriages of 'mixed orientation' – with straight women.[62] Closeted bisexual men were also generally depicted as older and more conservative. In Wolff's analysis of her study results, she stated that 'only a very small number of older [male] respondents lived in an atmosphere of understanding and openness with their wives […] [Most] lived a double life, wearing the mask of bourgeois respectability'.[63] In contrast to bisexual women, whom she described as 'more often stronger than men in having the courage of their convictions in sexual matters', Wolff said that 'bisexual men of the older generation' had 'an old-fashioned attitude' to their wives, regarding them 'condescendingly […] as a combination of mother and housekeeper' and adhering 'to the female idea of yesteryear'.[64] In addition to Simon Napier-Bell's hostile attitudes to gay liberation and women's liberation, the interview concluded with him expressing nostalgia for the 1950s and 1960s, and the headline described him as a 'Sixties Survivor' – perhaps implying that the old-fashioned attitudes of earlier decades had also 'survived' in him.[65] A *Gay News* readers' survey conducted in 1981 indicated that 8% of the 2,070 respondents described themselves as bisexual, 'with a bias towards people aged over 45'.[66] The analysis of the responses said that 'the younger you are, the more gutsy about coming out' – people over 45,

[61] Interview with Gwen (pseudonym), b. 1951, 9 October 2018.
[62] Interview with Gwen (pseudonym), b. 1951, 9 October 2018.
[63] Wolff, *Bisexuality*, 94.
[64] Wolff, *Bisexuality*, 93-95.
[65] Panayi, "Sixties Survivor", 42.
[66] Anonymous, "Results of the Gay News readers' survey", *Gay News*, October 1981, 3.

especially men, were less likely to be 'out' to their parents and were thus less 'gutsy'.[67] The hostility towards bisexual men who were seen as older, more closeted and more conservative was also reflective of the generational tension in the 1970s between GLF and older male campaigners such as Antony Grey, who were also seen as cowardly remnants of 'a past, more apologetic age'.[68]

The only instance from the 1970s and 1980s where a decision not to 'come out' was taken seriously in the gay press was in a 1984 feature on 'Asian Gays in Britain' in *HIM Gay Reporter*. Written by an Asian gay man, the article emphasised the importance of the extended family, and criticised racism amongst white gays:

> The policy of sexual liberation urges gay people to reject the family and to disclose themselves. The family is seen by white gays as the greatest source of their oppression. Asian gays are therefore encouraged to abandon the extended family and the heterosexual communities which are the prime source of their support. Yet such support is not replaced to my knowledge by the predominantly white and frequently racist gay groups.[69]

The mainstream 'coming out' narrative was and is a particularly white narrative, as one member of the Gay Black Group interviewed in 1983 stated: 'I got thrown out from home, because of the way I'd come out to them. I'd come out to them in a – I suppose identifying in a very white, middle-class way'.[70] After he had subsequently spoken to them 'in more specifically Asian terms', he had found more acceptance, although he did not specify what these terms were. As the 'Asian Gays in Britain' writer stated, members of the Gay Black Group also emphasised that family was more important to them than liberationist critiques of the family would acknowledge: 'I think my family is more important than my sexuality. At the moment'.[71] Another member highlighted how language itself was an issue – 'I couldn't explain to [my mother] what homosexual meant, because there was no word equivalent in Urdu'.[72] This 'language barrier' or 'textual misrecognitions' can

---

[67] Anonymous, "Gay News readers' survey", 4.
[68] Robinson, *Gay Men and the Left*, 79.
[69] Anonymous, "Asian Gays in Britain: A Personal View", *HIM Gay Reporter*, March 1984, 41.
[70] Anonymous member of the Gay Black Group interviewed for *Gay Black Group,* 1983, https://player.bfi.org.uk/free/film/watch-gay-black-group-1983-online.
[71] *Gay Black Group*, 1983.
[72] *Gay Black Group*, 1983.

also be seen in relation to black and migrant homosexuals more broadly, as Nadia Ellis points out – 'postwar discourses around blackness and queerness […] generally occurred in separate realms, on separate occasions', and made it impossible for the black homosexual to be recognised as homosexual.[73] Black and Asian gay men and lesbians were also often excluded from dominant narratives of 'coming out'.

Bisexuality and multiple-gender-attraction in Black and Asian discussions of 'coming out' were again associated with 'closetedness', although this was generally linked to necessity rather than the more patronising white explanation of 'cowardice'. For example, a Gay Black Group member said that he used to 'fight against [homosexual identity] when I was younger, say that I was bisexual', and other members spoke about considering marriage to a different-gender spouse as a way to maintain familial and social approval. In the sense that getting married and having a family were particularly important in Black and Asian households, it is possible that bisexuality and multiple-gender-attraction would have been more acceptable, because they did not necessarily preclude this. Although the arguments against 'coming out' by members of the Gay Black Group and the author of the 'Asian Gays in Britain' article were not immediately dismissed by white gay men and lesbians in the same way as other arguments, they do seem to have been largely ignored. The criticisms of 'closeted' people made by writers such as Baker seem to have continued unabated, along with the broader individualistic criticisms of the family unit.

Bi-Monthly newsletter tried to chart a 'middle course' between the exhortations to 'come out' in gay and lesbian publications, and the more critical attitudes towards 'coming out' discussed by some interviewees who were attracted to multiple genders. In the 21 issues that were published between 1984 and 1989, 'coming out' was only explicitly discussed once, in a feature titled 'Three very different viewpoints from three very different women…'.[74] The first woman, Stephanie Norris, co-editor of a book called *Out in the Open*, emphasised 'coming out' in

---

[73] Ellis, "Black Migrants, White Queers", 895.
[74] 'Coming Out: Three very different viewpoints from three very different women…', *Bi-Monthly*, December 1985 – January 1986, 10-11.

a similar way to gay and lesbian writing: 'coming out is terribly important', because it 'breaks down the invisible barrier' and encourages the heterosexual majority to 'think: Oh well it must be alright'.[75] The second woman signed her letter 'Desperate', as if to an agony aunt, and spoke of her 'feelings of despair and isolation', and sense that 'I still feel I cannot tell everyone about myself'.[76] She implied that her reluctance to 'come out' was as the result of prejudice from romantic partners ('I had a relationship with a young woman, but she thought you had to be gay or straight but couldn't be bi'), but then went on to say that she had since had a relationship with a bisexual woman but still felt that she could not 'tell everyone'.[77] This story could be seen as indicative of an early 'stage' in the 'coming out' process, and thus as supporting the idea that 'coming out' would enable 'Desperate' to feel more confident and secure. However, the fact that she did not reveal her name, and the persistence of her feelings of reluctance about 'coming out', could also be seen as a challenge to linear, progressive narratives. Hegemonic discourses of 'coming out' as the pathway to political liberation and individual composure could even be seen as further damaging to 'Desperate', by creating the sense that to 'tell everyone' would solve her problems.

As the third 'viewpoint' in the *Bi-Monthly* article shows, 'coming out' did not necessarily 'solve' problems for bisexual people, and could lead to more difficulties. Sally Knocker described 'coming out' as bisexual to 200 students at a meeting discussing gay and lesbian 'coming out stories'.[78] Her attitude was a broadly positive one, concluding that 'Exeter bisexual students are at last creeping out of their heterosexual hideaways'.[79] However, she also described feelings of uncertainty and concern which do not necessarily align with positive narratives. She stated that Exeter bisexual students were 'not actually going to start a specific Bi Soc', because meetings with

---

[75] Stephanie Norris, "Coming Out: Three very different viewpoints from three very different women…", *Bi-Monthly*, December 1985 – January 1986, 11.
[76] 'Desperate', "Coming Out: Three very different viewpoints from three very different women…", *Bi-Monthly*, December 1985 – January 1986, 10.
[77] 'Desperate', "Coming Out", 10.
[78] Sally Knocker, "Coming Out: Three very different viewpoints from three very different women…", *Bi-Monthly*, December 1985 – January 1986, 10-11.
[79] Knocker, "Coming Out", 11.

the Gay Soc and the university's Antisexist society were believed to be sufficient. She also said that 'having made an issue of my own sexuality in public I confess I was also afraid of it taking over', because she felt that other aspects of her personality were equally important, and was worried that she had 'started some trendy epidemic, rather than anything permanent and meaningful'.[80] Knocker seemed to hold the view that bisexuality was essentially a watered-down version of homosexuality – in her 'coming out' speech she 'stressed [her] strong empathy for gay people and admitted with regret that it had been easier in the past to enjoy heterosexual privilege', and said that 'I hoped that by openly declaring my bisexuality I would be exposing myself to all that gay students face on campus'.[81] When some other students made jokes at her expense, she said that the jokes 'stab[bed] hard' but enabled her to better 'understand the biting prejudices that gay people have to put up with daily'.[82]

It is difficult to generalise about the position taken towards 'coming out' in the bisexual press in the late twentieth century based on this single article. However, the fact that it *is* just a single article, which demonstrates a mixture of attitudes to 'coming out', suggests the fledgling bisexual organisations that began to develop in the 1980s had a slightly more ambivalent attitude towards 'outness' than the gay and lesbian press. While they do not appear to have been explicitly critical of 'coming out' discourses in the 1980s, nor were they fervent believers that, as GLF argued, 'IT MUST BE DONE'.[83] The complex and ambivalent attitudes in the bisexual press occurred to an even greater extent in bisexual interviews, as I will discuss in greater detail below.

'Coming Out' in the Twenty-First Century

In historiography, the influence of queer studies and queer critical history means that analyses of 'coming out' since the 1990s have moved away from the framework established by Weeks' theorisation of 'coming out' and 'coming together'. As well as exploring the shifting

[80] Knocker, "Coming Out", 11.
[81] Knocker, "Coming Out", 10.
[82] Knocker, "Coming Out", 11.
[83] GLF, *What is GLF*, 3.

meanings of 'coming out', as discussed at the start of this chapter, Chauncey criticises the assumption that those who did not 'speak out […] had internalised anti-gay attitudes'.[84] Similarly, Laura Doan critiques 'progressivist' lesbian and gay history which constructs the study of history around an idea of oppression followed by 'outness' and liberation.[85] Social scientists have also begun to critique the stage models of 'coming out' that suggest it is inherently liberating – for example, Kate Klein *et al* argue, based on their work with LGBTQ youth, that 'coming out is a socially complex process that is mitigated by too many contextual factors to be understood linearly or moralistically'.[86]

In bisexuality studies, too, many sociologists have criticised the concept of 'coming out'. Emil Maliepaard argues that his interviewees generally did not disclose bisexuality unless there was a 'relevant' reason to do so, and that this disclosure was usually a means to an end rather than an end in itself.[87] Kirsten McLean criticises the 'disclosure imperative' and emphasises the importance of considering 'factors that make coming out as bisexual especially difficult', primarily stereotypes and internal uncertainty, arguing that 'to claim that a person who has not come out is lacking, dishonest or not empowered is to ignore the complexities of both identity development and coming out itself'.[88]

This shift in the historiography of 'coming out' towards a more critical approach has also been accompanied by a recent shift in media and social media discourses of 'coming out'. Although I am interested in bisexuality and multiple-gender-attraction in the 1970s and 1980s, the nature of oral history interviews means that it is also important to consider the context in which the interviews took place – in my case, 2018-2020. I will explore how far 'prevailing

---

[84] Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 5.
[85] Doan, *Disturbing Practices*, x.
[86] Kate Klein, Alix Holtby, Katie Cook and Robb Travers, "Complicating the Coming Out Narrative: Becoming Oneself in a Heterosexist and Cissexist World", *Journal of Homosexuality* 62, 3 (2015): 324.
[87] Emil Maliepaard, "Disclosing Bisexuality or Coming Out? Two Different Realities for Bisexual People in the Netherlands", *Journal of Bisexuality* 18, no. 2 (2018): 145-167.
[88] Kirsten McLean, "Hiding in the Closet? Bisexuals, coming out and the disclosure imperative", *Journal of Sociology* 43, no. 2 (2007): 151, 164.

discursive constructions' in the present influenced interviewees' memories of the past in greater detail in Chapter Five.[89] For now, it is important to note that these present-day discourses *do* have an effect on interviewees' narratives, and as such it is important to analyse discourses about 'coming out' that are prevalent in the late 2010s, as well as in the 1970s and 1980s.

On October 11th, 'National Coming Out Day', positive 'coming out stories' are often accompanied by reminders that people don't 'have to' come out if they are not 'ready yet', or if it would endanger them or cause them to lose support. For example, a BBC article for National Coming Out Day 2018 focussed on stories of people who 'can't come out at home', mostly due to fears of family hostility linked to 'cultural differences'.[90] The charity Stonewall, which was formed in 1989 and takes a generally moderate, institutional approach to LGBTQ rights, emphasised in an article also focussed on National Coming Out Day that 'telling someone about your sexuality and/or gender identity should always be a personal decision and no one should ever feel pressured to come out'.[91] This is in contrast to, for example, Baker's discussion paper for C.H.E. in 1973, which acknowledged that an 'objection' to coming out ('I would lose my job/flat') was 'in certain cases […] probably quite true', and said that 'I would never seek to dismiss or minimise the difficulty of coming out to family and friends particularly if the individual is young', but then piously stated that the fear of telling family and friends is 'at best debatable […] love is not love that alters when it alteration finds'.[92] Objections to 'coming out' are therefore given slightly more credence in the twenty-first century than in the 1970s and 1980s.

However, conventional narratives of 'coming out' still hold a great deal of influence in popular culture in the twenty-first century. Cohen argues that 'modern confessional culture' today has its roots in the 1970s, and there does appear to be a great deal of continuity between

---

[89] Penny Summerfield, "Culture and Composure: Creating Narratives of the Gendered Self in Oral History Interviews", *Cultural and Social History* 1, no. 1 (2004): 66.
[90] Shivani Dave and Michael Baggs, "National Coming Out Day: Why I can't come out at home", *BBC Newsbeat*, 11 Oct 2018, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/newsbeat-45813239.
[91] Dhesi, "National Coming Out Day 2018".
[92] Baker, "Gay Lifestyle", 1973 discussion paper, 4.

exhortations to 'come out' in the 1970s and today.[93] For example, the same Stonewall article that emphasises 'no one should ever feel pressured to come out' also states that 'when we can talk about and share what coming out was like for us, we can offer much needed strength and support to those who may be struggling with similar fears and anxiety we once faced'.[94] In the United States, the Human Rights Campaign, another moderate rights-based organisation, made this point in even stronger terms, arguing that 'Coming out […] STILL MATTERS. When people know someone who is LGBTQ, they are far more likely to support equality under the law […] Every person who speaks up changes more hearts and minds, and creates new advocates for equality.[95]

The 'It Gets Better' project claims that since 2010 'over 60,000 people have shared their It Gets Better story'.[96] This project states that it aims to 'provid[e] access to an arsenal of uplifting and inspiring stories of hope, resilience and determination', and in its very title promises the linear structure that Plummer describes: 'problems are resolved in some fashion'.[97] Furthermore, the continued prominence in the UK and USA of 'National Coming Out Day', which has been observed since 1988, and the essentialist narratives of 'Coming Out as Your True Identity', indicates that the caveats about not 'having' to come out 'yet' are simply that – rhetorical caveats, rather than thorough considerations of the complexities inherent in 'coming out'.[98] Popular culture and especially the media in the twenty-first century still invoke a 'disclosure imperative', in which 'coming out' is portrayed as of key importance for individuals and the 'LGBTQ community'.

---

[93] Cohen, *Family Secrets*, xx.
[94] Dhesi, "National Coming Out Day 2018".
[95] Human Rights Campaign, "Celebrate National Coming Out Day with HRC!", *HRC.org*, 11 Oct 2018, https://www.hrc.org/resources/national-coming-out-day. Emphasis in source.
[96] It Gets Better Project, "About Our Global Movement", *itgetsbetter.org,* 2010 – 2018, https://itgetsbetter.org/about/.
[97] It Gets Better Project, "Our Vision / Mission / People", *itgetsbetter.org,* 2010 – 2018, https://itgetsbetter.org/initiatives/mission-vision-people/; Plummer, *Telling Sexual Stories*, 83.
[98] Human Rights Campaign, "Celebrate National Coming Out Day!"

Multiple-Gender-Attraction and 'Coming Out'

Questioning the Importance of 'Coming Out'

As discussed in the Introduction, Nan Alamilla Boyd questions how far queer oral history can achieve the aim of moving 'beyond the limits of identity politics', because historical narrators are unable to 'verbalise their same-sex experiences outside the paradigm of gay and lesbian identities'.[99] On the topic of 'coming out', she is even more specific, arguing that:

> When political entitlements are linked to public visibility, a language about community based on the relative value of "outness" and "closetedness" has come to structure not only the way historians of gay and lesbian communities do research [...] but also the ways those who engage in same-sex practices verbalise their experiences.[100]

She emphasises that it is not that the voices of those who 'do not fall within the confines of modern sexual identities' are *silent*, but that 'their experiences are often vilified as cowardly or unintelligible within the limits of comprehensible speech (Some modern gay men and lesbians might ask "Why don't they just come out?")'.[101] In Boyd's own research, despite her attempts as an interviewer to 'decenter gay identity from the heart of [her] project', 'most narrators worked hard to recenter gay identity as the space from which they could speak about themselves'.[102]

Following Boyd's analysis, and given the continued dominance of mainstream 'coming out stories', I expected that interviewees would generally follow the structures of the 'modernist tales' discussed by Plummer.[103] However, I found that in many cases interviewees *did* find ways of moving beyond dominant narratives of 'outness' and 'closetedness'. This aligns with Helena Mills' analysis of women's memories of the 'swinging sixties', where interviewees used their own experiences to critique 'popular memory' and mainstream discourses.[104] My interviewees, the Hall-Carpenter interviewees and Wolff's interviewees presented alternatives to the more

---

[99] Boyd, "Who is the subject?", 186.
[100] Boyd, "Who is the subject?", 186.
[101] Boyd, "Who is the subject?", 186.
[102] Boyd, "Who is the subject?", 188.
[103] Plummer, *Telling Sexual Stories*, 82-83.
[104] Helena Mills, "Using the personal to critique the popular: women's memories of 1960s youth", *Contemporary British History* 30, no. 4 (2016): 463-483.

simplistic and positive 'coming out' narratives that were emphasised in written sources – either by directly criticising the concept of 'coming out', or by following different narrative structures that presented a non-linear view of community and identity.

Some interviewees did assign a lot of political and personal importance to the concept of 'coming out'. For Gwen, who suggested that identifying as 'not completely lesbian' might 'muddy the water', 'coming out' – specifically, as gay or lesbian – was a political necessity to help counter prejudice and discrimination.[105] Another interviewee, Louise (b. 1966) also mentioned politics when describing 'coming out' as bisexual in the early 2000s: '*because* I'd been so out as a lesbian, and *because* of my politics, erm, around being out, I felt like… I needed to identify clearly […] I had to adopt that identity, and think about what it meant to me, and how I was going to communicate it to people'.[106] Louise 'came out' as bisexual, after previously identifying as lesbian, at around the same time that she started working on a lesbian magazine. She seemed to feel a sense of obligation to come out to her employer in order to 'warn' her about this, as well as possibly try to establish whether bisexual women were accepted at her new place of work: 'so I said […] "I've – you know, I've had a couple of flings with men, and I can't guarantee that there's not going to be more of that in the pipeline"'.[107] Another interviewee, Vera (b. 1960), linked 'coming out' to her desire to be 'open' and more connected to her family: 'I've never liked having to keep secrets, and I've always felt like with my – if my mum and dad wanted to be part of my life, which they said they did, then – I needed to be able to tell them about it'.[108] These interviewees therefore echoed the gay liberationist argument about the importance of 'coming out' – that it was both politically and personally important – although their 'coming out stories' did not necessarily follow linear or positive narratives, as I will discuss below.

However, other interviewees argued that 'coming out' was not necessary or could be

[105] Interview with Gwen (pseudonym), b. 1951, 9 October 2018.
[106] Interview with Louise, b. 1966, 27 July 2018.
[107] Interview with Louise, b. 1966, 27 July 2018.
[108] Interview with Vera (pseudonym), b. 1960, 26 October 2018.

detrimental. Given the prevailing popular discourses about the importance of 'coming out' discussed above, it is perhaps unsurprising that there was an element of defensiveness in these statements, such as Aidan's (b. 1971) comment: 'I don't feel the need to tell my family. Even now. Because why should I? why should I have to have the big conversation? Why should I have to do it? […] To justify who I am?'.[109] For Aidan, to 'come out' was to be forced to 'justify' himself to others. Another interviewee, Nigel (b. 1963), discussed the tension he felt between 'trying to be open' and his desire for 'privacy':

> I was concerned that - one part of my life, I didn't want to be broadcasting it to another part of my life. Erm, and... I've always had that sort of dichotomy of trying to be open, about my sexuality, but also wanting the privacy, as well, it's not everybody's business, and, you know, straight people don't go around saying "hey look, I'm straight", and I don't see why anybody from sort of the queer side of the spectrum should have to do the same.[110]

Nigel later said that he had told his son about his bisexuality but didn't want to tell the rest of his family: 'I just can't be bothered […] it comes back to that privacy versus openness thing. Erm, it's nothing to do with my brother and sister'.[111] His emphasis on the importance of privacy and his 'can't be bothered' echoed Aidan's description of 'the big conversation', a sense perhaps that 'coming out' would involve too much energy and upheaval for potentially little reason. These explanations are reminiscent of the decisions made by many homosexual men in the 1950s, according to Cohen, who 'wished to avoid confronting their relations with the bald facts. To force a conversation was to risk disrupting the accommodations that allowed the suspected – or obvious – to remain unspoken'.[112] While gay liberationists came to decry 'privacy' in the 1970s as 'another word for isolation and oblivion', the arguments of these interviewees suggest that many attracted to multiple genders continued to prize it.[113] Nigel and Aidan's arguments also align with Maliepaard's findings in his sociological interviews with bisexual people in the Netherlands, where interviewees described wanting to 'avoid making their sexuality a big deal', and one

---

[109] Interview with Aidan, b. 1971, 22 June 2018.
[110] Interview with Nigel, b. 1963, 12 January 2019.
[111] Interview with Nigel, b. 1963, 12 January 2019.
[112] Cohen, *Family Secrets*, 150.
[113] Cohen, *Family Secrets*, 230.

interviewee said: 'I don't want intense discussions'.[114] Similarly, Curtis (b. 1958) said that he 'didn't really need to have a conversation, I didn't really fancy having a conversation'.[115]

Instead, Curtis hinted to members of his family in more subtle ways: 'it wasn't like that coming out moment where you go and say "right guys, sit down, I've got something to tell you" […] it was just more… by dress, by clues, by not being guarded about it'.[116] This is what McLean describes as the strategy of 'testing the waters': 'hinting or making suggestive comments about their same-sex attractions without any specific reference to bisexuality'.[117] Nigel also described adopting a similar approach with his mother, by explicitly disavowing a 'gay' identity but arguing against homophobic statements. However, he received a hostile response, which led him to decide not to tell her:

> I've sort of hinted quite often. My mom once […] was being a little bit homophobic, and I pulled her up on it, and er […] I can't remember what it was. And I said, "mom, if I was gay, I'd tell – I'd tell you". And she said "yes you bloody well would, just to wind me up, wouldn't you". And I've said to people since, I've said – look, I just can't be bothered to tell her.[118]

Another theme that Maliepaard found in his interviews was the idea that 'expressing bisexuality means talking about [their] sex life' and that interviewees were reluctant to 'come out' because of this sexualisation.[119] This theme also arose in another of my interviews. Neil (b. 1958) said:

> I've still not declared to my kids or my family that I'm bisexual. But […] well, does it matter? In the same way I don't think I'd declare them that I'm interested in shibari [erotic rope bondage] or… or, or, or flogging somebody [*laughs slightly*] […] I'm not *ashamed* of it. Er, but […] why would I tell *friends* […] they don't tell me about their sex life.[120]

Neil linked his bisexuality to his interest in BDSM and kink, and both were something that he didn't want to disclose to his children or friends. Later in the interview, however, he said that he

---

[114] Maliepaard, "Disclosing Bisexuality", 151.
[115] Interview with Curtis (pseudonym), b. 1958, 24 July 2018.
[116] Interview with Curtis (pseudonym), b. 1958, 24 July 2018.
[117] McLean, "Hiding in the Closet", 161.
[118] Interview with Nigel, b. 1963, 12 January 2019.
[119] Maliepaard, "Disclosing Bisexuality", 153.
[120] Interview with Neil (pseudonym), b. 1958, 26 September 2018.

would be more willing to tell friends about his kinky life than his bisexuality:

> I might have told people that I'm kinky […] the people I – those friends from school, you know, have known me for years, and so […] that to them is well it's quite - that's quite exciting. If I say to them "I'm bisexual", they might go - "mm, weirdo" [*laughs briefly*] […] That's interesting, that I have – I'm more open about being in the kinky world, than I am about being in the – erm, being bisexual. So… [*laughs*].[121]

Neil's discomposure in relation to these topics was indicated not just by his words, but also by his frequent laughter. As with some of my other interviewees who seemed defensive about not 'coming out', this could be a recognition of the fact that his approach does not conform to the 'disclosure imperative'.[122] It may also be a general sense of discomfort at discussing sexual practices, perhaps especially given my position as interviewer, and the fact that I was much younger and a woman.

Neil's individual experience of bisexuality was as a primarily 'sexual' identity, which could explain the links he made between 'coming out' as bisexual and talking about his sex life. He began to 'explore' both bisexuality and the fetish scene around the same time, after his divorce, and his current relationship with a woman included same-sex encounters as part of 'play': 'we have since, subsequently, dabbled a bit with her playing with another girl. And we've also play - me sort of have a, you know, me playing with another guy […] we talk about everything, and... we'll go to fetish clubs together, or we'll hire dungeons'.[123] He described himself as emotionally attracted to women, but said that his attraction to men was 'a sexual thing […] I didn't, couldn't see – and I probably still can't now, envisage having a – a relationship, with a man. Sex, yes, but not a relationship'.[124] He was not involved in bisexual organisations or politics, and described feeling alienated from them.

As discussed in the previous chapter, bisexuality and multiple-gender-attraction were often seen as inherently more 'sexual', and Neil's reluctance to 'come out' demonstrates the long-

---

[121] Interview with Neil (pseudonym), b. 1958, 26 September 2018.
[122] McLean, "Hiding in the Closet", 152.
[123] Interview with Neil (pseudonym), b. 1958, 26 September 2018.
[124] Interview with Neil (pseudonym), b. 1958, 26 September 2018.

term effects of this hyper-sexualisation. At the same time, his concern that his friends might think he was a 'weirdo' if he said he was bisexual, unlike if he discussed being kinky, suggests that there *was* some differentiation between discussing his bisexuality and discussing his sex life. Bisexuality was too sexual to disclose to family and friends, but also not as 'exciting' or titillating as – and, potentially, more personal than – his kinky life.

As mentioned at the start of this chapter, Ossian, who had been involved with South London GLF, had 'come out' in the 1970s, but in retrospect described it as 'grossly disempowering'.[125] Unlike the position taken by gay liberation groups during the 1970s, which linked 'coming out' to being 'liberated' and able to engage in activism, Ossian felt that 'coming out' had made it *harder* for him to advocate for gay liberation: 'You know, if I hadn't come out, I could've argued the Gay Lib case with my dad. But once I'd come out, it was […] like, you couldn't say anything. I was… the words were taken out of my mouth'.[126] Ossian was also critical of the gay liberation argument that 'coming out' could facilitate 'coming together'. Rather, he saw 'coming out' as creating division, because instead of focussing on the 'common ground', those who emphasised 'coming out' – and, perhaps, identity politics more broadly – were 'creating difference. And tension, and, nonsense'.[127] Interviewees therefore expressed a range of opinions about 'coming out' but many, particularly men, actively resisted the 'disclosure imperative' in the media and amongst gay liberation groups.

Ossian's critique of gay liberation ideas about 'coming out' also involved a broader critique of what he saw as hypocrisy on the part of South London GLF's leadership: 'A lot of the leadership of the South London gay lib *hadn't* come out! They'd been, you know, *found* out in various ways […] very few of them had actually come out, and they were recommending this course of action'.[128] This indicates that the 'disclosure imperative' in the writings of the gay and

[125] Interview with Ossian (pseudonym), b. 1954, 13 August 2018.
[126] Interview with Ossian (pseudonym), b. 1954, 13 August 2018.
[127] Interview with Ossian (pseudonym), b. 1954, 13 August 2018.
[128] Interview with Ossian (pseudonym), b. 1954, 13 August 2018.

bisexual press and gay liberation groups did not necessarily reflect the actual actions and feelings of people at the time. Personal narratives demonstrated more complicated and ambivalent feelings about 'coming out' than published works from the same period would suggest. This can also be seen in the testimonies of Wolff's subjects and in the Hall-Carpenter interviews. These interviewees very rarely invoked the terminology of 'coming out' and the 'closet'. Although their perspectives were mixed, they generally de-emphasised 'coming out'.

One of the autobiographical excerpts published in Wolff's study, by 'Penelope', said of her relationship with another woman simply that 'it has become necessary to explain this turn of events to our husbands'.[129] In one of the edited interview transcripts Wolff includes, 'Mrs B' also stated that her husband 'knows that I love women'.[130] However, both women focus more on the reception to their 'coming out', which in both cases seems to have been positive – 'he appears not to be jealous', 'Andrew has been remarkably understanding about it all [...] and is very sympathetic towards lesbians' – than on the reasons that they felt 'coming out' had 'become necessary'.[131] They seem to view 'coming out' to their husbands as important, but more detail than this is difficult to ascertain. One of Wolff's male interviewees, 'Gordon', wrote about telling his wife about an affair he had with a woman, Carmen: 'I broke down and told Julia all about it. Disaster, it looked as if our marriage was on the rocks'.[132] However, when he 'came out' about his sexuality, rather than his infidelity, the response was more positive:

> I confessed to Julia that I was bisexual, and that the attraction of Carmen was that she is a really bossy butch woman [...] Julia was not surprised that I was gay. Apparently she had known about me before we were married, and had not minded at all [...] Even now she does not object to my having relationships with men as long as I keep it away from the family.[133]

However, 'openness' only went so far for Gordon – he wrote about continuing to engage in extramarital relationships with women, but his wife 'believes that all these absences have been

---

[129] Penelope, quoted in Wolff, *Bisexuality*, 157.
[130] 'Mrs B', quoted in Wolff, *Bisexuality*, 115.
[131] 'Mrs B', quoted in Wolff, *Bisexuality*, 115; Penelope, quoted in Wolff, *Bisexuality*, 157-158.
[132] Gordon, quoted in Wolff, *Bisexuality*, 190. Note that – as far as I am aware – Carmen described here is not the same as the woman who was interviewed for this project and chose the pseudonym Carmen.
[133] Gordon, quoted in Wolff, *Bisexuality*, 191.

with men. She never knew about my new girlfriend'.[134] This, coupled with his comment about Carmen being 'really bossy' and 'butch', reveals interesting gender dynamics in these relationships, which I will discuss further in the next chapter, on Relationships and Attraction.

In Gordon, 'Mrs B' and Penelope's cases, the discussion of 'coming out' focused on people who were in 'mixed marriages' with heterosexual partners, and whether their spouse was aware of their sexuality. This links to Cohen's argument about the ways in which 'openness pervaded social relationships in the 1970s' – 'in the sexually revolutionary decade of 1968-1978, adultery became much more common, but so, too, did the habit of telling one's wife'.[135] Julia's concern that her husband's relationships with men be kept 'away from the family' reveals an interesting mix of permissiveness, by tolerating Gordon's extramarital relationships, with a desire to protect the privacy of the family. Unlike my interviewees, who generally discussed 'coming out' in terms of telling their parents, siblings and children, Wolff's interviewees focused on the different context of telling their spouses.

Wolff's interviewees' accounts also differed from the written documents of the late twentieth century, which envisaged 'coming out' to an audience of 'straight society' broadly-defined, but perhaps especially to parents and work colleagues – at least, this is what was focused on in *Gay News*' readers' survey in 1981.[136] There were only two cases where Wolff's interviewees discussed 'coming out' in relation to their parents and siblings. In 'Ruth's' autobiographical excerpt she said that her brother 'knows I'm bisexual but doesn't seem very keen to discuss it. I think it embarrasses him. My mother's the same'.[137] In the interview with 'Alan', he said he did not want to 'come out' to his parents: 'I did not mind anybody knowing, apart from my parents. They had many problems at the time, and I did not want to add to them'.[138] In terms of the importance of 'coming out', then, Wolff's bisexual interviewees in the 1970s seemed to think that

---

[134] Gordon, quoted in Wolff, *Bisexuality*, 192.
[135] Cohen, *Family Secrets*, 237.
[136] Anonymous, "Gay News readers' survey", 3-4.
[137] Ruth, quoted in Wolff, *Bisexuality*, 147.
[138] Alan, quoted in Wolff, *Bisexuality*, 120.

disclosing extramarital relationships to their spouses was important, but were more ambivalent about 'coming out' in the wider sense, such as by telling other family members or 'straight society' more broadly.

In the Hall-Carpenter interviews, 'coming out' to other people was again rarely discussed. When it arose, it was usually prompted by the interviewer. One interviewee, Christopher (b. 1944), was asked by the interviewer to describe the 'process' of 'coming out' to his family in 1966.[139] However, he seemed to see it in a different, less political way than the interviewer was suggesting: 'erm… didn't particularly think of it as coming out. Or think of it as a political process, at the time… like, that came a bit later'.[140] In contrast to the statements by my interviewees about not wanting to have 'the big conversation' to 'come out', in Christopher's case it was his family who felt that it was unnecessary, echoing Cohen's argument that 'to be accepted, the queer man often had to remain silent': 'I can remember my father kept saying – well, why do you want to talk about it? Why do you have to *tell* anybody about it? Is this really necessary?'.[141]

Another interviewee, David (also known as Della) (b. 1944), was asked three times by the interviewer about 'coming out' to his mother.[142] Initially, he said that she 'must have' noticed, because 'everyone' must have noticed, as he was sometimes dressing in 'semi-drag' and had a very feminine appearance. When asked a second time, he discussed the circumstances of his meeting another man, bringing him home, and sleeping with him. When asked a third time about how his mother reacted, he eventually admitted: 'Erm, my mother done her nut, actually. Coz it was the first time I had ever, actually, *blatanted* [*sic*] the sexual part of my homosexuality […] And,

[139] Christopher Spence, b. 1944, interviewed by MF, 26 September 1990, The British Library: HCA Oral History Project, C456/95.
[140] Christopher Spence, b. 1944, interviewed by MF, 26 September 1990, The British Library: HCA Oral History Project, C456/95.
[141] Cohen, *Family Secrets*, 149; Christopher Spence, b. 1944, interviewed by MF, 26 September 1990, The British Library: HCA Oral History Project, C456/95.
[142] David (Della) McKenna, b. 1944, interviewed by Emma Hindley (EH), 27 January 1994, The British Library: HCA Oral History Project, C456/125.

she… found it very very difficult to handle that'.[143] In retrospect, he argued that he thought 'coming out' about the 'sexual' element of his identity was wrong:

> And I can understand why, and I know *now* that it was a very *wrong* thing to do, and it's something I've never ever done since. My sexual part of my homosexuality is now a very private part of my life. And I *don't* and wouldn't dream, I mean, there's no way I would sit in front of my mother holding hands with somebody, or there's no way I would blatantly let her see me kissing somebody, or whatever […] don't hurt [your family] by throwing the sexual part of it at them as well.[144]

His clear discomposure and hesitation to talk about this memory could well be because it was difficult for him to recount his mother's negative reaction – he seemed keen to justify her response, and generally characterised her in the interview as being supportive and tolerant. His suggestion that 'coming out' might actually be a 'very *wrong* thing to do' also clearly differed from mainstream discourses of 'coming out', and his discomposure could be due to an awareness that he was contradicting these liberationist narratives.

Some female Hall-Carpenter interviewees did emphasise the importance of 'coming out' – Ellen (b. 1956) talked about finding 'courage' at Greenham Common to 'come out' as both a lesbian and an incest survivor.[145] She then said that she had 'come out' twice – initially 'it wasn't a political choice', but because 'I actually happened to be attracted to a woman', but the second time at Greenham 'I was actually standing up to say that I was a lesbian, it was more of a political choice'.[146]

In contrast, another interviewee, Beryl (b. 1947), talked about how the many other women 'coming out' in the 1970s and 1980s made her decide *not* to do the same, because she wanted to resist what she saw as 'pressure'.[147] Like some of my interviewees, she also said that

---

[143] David (Della) McKenna, b. 1944, interviewed by EH, 27 January 1994, The British Library: HCA Oral History Project, C456/125.
[144] David (Della) McKenna, b. 1944, b. 1944, interviewed by EH, 27 January 1994, The British Library: HCA Oral History Project, C456/125.
[145] Ellen Noor, b. 1956, interviewed by unknown interviewer, 1985, The British Library: HCA Oral History Project, C456/46.
[146] Ellen Noor, b. 1956, interviewed by unknown interviewer, 1985, The British Library: HCA Oral History Project, C456/46.
[147] Beryl Foster, b. 1947, interviewed by MF, 17 May 1991, The British Library: HCA Oral History Project, C456/108.

she was dissuaded by 'what an *effort* it would all be, I suppose…'.[148] The interviewer explicitly asked her whether she wanted to 'sort of describe [her] sexuality, for this interview', and Beryl responded noncommittally: 'Do I – well I – I don't know – in what way?'.[149]

The Hall-Carpenter interviews therefore presented a mixed perspective on the importance of 'coming out', with Ellen clearly considering it to be important, Beryl and David/Della questioning it, and Christopher being more ambivalent. However, it is also important to note that 'coming out' was only really discussed in three of these interviews when the interviewers themselves raised the issue. In the case of David/Della, the interviewer asked the same question about his mother's reaction to his 'coming out' three separate times, in spite of his discomposure. In contrast to Boyd's assessment of her *interviewees* 'work[ing] hard to recenter gay identity' despite her efforts to 'decenter [this] from the heart of [her] project', I would argue that in the case of the Hall-Carpenter interviews it was the *interviewers* who encouraged or at least expected mainstream narratives of 'coming out', despite their interviewees sometimes making attempts to resist this.[150] The interviewers' questions and editing were implicitly trying to mobilise the dominant 'coming out' narrative as defined by Plummer – from childhood, to first desire, realisation and so on – even when interviewees seemed more hesitant or ambivalent about this narrative. Like my interviewees in the twenty-first century, Hall-Carpenter interviewees who experienced multiple-gender-attraction generally did not structure their life narratives around teleological stories of 'coming out'.

Interviewees who were attracted to multiple genders therefore expressed a greater range of attitudes towards 'coming out' than the conventional gay and lesbian 'coming out story' publicised by organisations and the gay press. Although some still viewed 'coming out' as politically and/or personally important, others were ambivalent or expressed more negative

---

[148] Beryl Foster, b. 1947, interviewed by MF, 17 May 1991, The British Library: HCA Oral History Project, C456/108.
[149] Beryl Foster, b. 1947, interviewed by MF, 17 May 1991, The British Library: HCA Oral History Project, C456/108.
[150] Boyd, "Who is the subject?", 188.

attitudes. These were often explained in reference to a desire for privacy, or concerns about the problems that 'coming out' could present – for example because bisexuality was so often sexualised.

'Coming Out' and Gender

All of my interviewees who argued that 'coming out' was unnecessary or unhelpful were men, apart from Aidan, who was nonbinary. In fact, all but one of the men I interviewed were ambivalent or critical about the concept of 'coming out', whereas none of the women were explicitly critical of it.[151] This gender disparity was less clearly evident in the Hall-Carpenter interviews, but a similar pattern could be found amongst Wolff's interviewees. Gordon and Alan, unlike Wolff's female interviewees who discussed 'coming out', both stated that there were limits to their 'outness': Gordon in relation to his family, and in terms of telling his wife about his relationships with other women; Alan in relation to his parents.[152]

This could suggest that the associations made in the 1970s and 1980s between bisexual men and 'closetedness' had some truth. Hegemonic ideals of masculinity often discourage men from sharing their feelings openly, and so men were perhaps more likely to prioritise 'privacy' over 'openness', as Nigel did.[153] In relation to my interviewees, many of the women seemed to have closer relationships with their families than the male interviewees did. Female interviewees were therefore less likely to express Nigel's view that 'it's nothing to do with' them, and more likely to follow Vera in arguing that she 'needed' to tell her parents to have them be 'part of [her] life'.[154]

---

[151] The exception is Dave, b. 1960, who said: 'I obviously saw coming out, being out to - people at work and friends and so forth as... important as part of this whole thing we were trying to do of making people more aware about bisexuality'. He also explicitly linked his beliefs to the political arguments of the 1970s and 1980s: 'the - classic thing that, erm, people found during the '70s, er... for lesbians and gays, as well, you know, the more people knew... someone who was lesbian or gay, or bi - by association, the more accepting they would be'. Interview with Dave, b. 1960, 11 January 2020.
[152] Gordon, quoted in Wolff, *Bisexuality*, 190; Alan, quoted in Wolff, *Bisexuality*, 120.
[153] Michael Roper and John Tosh, *Manful Assertions: Masculinities in Britain since 1800* (London: Routledge, 1991); Interview with Nigel, b. 1963, 12 January 2019.
[154] Interview with Vera (pseudonym), b. 1960, 26 October 2018.

Another possible reason behind these gender differences relates to the varying levels of visible non-normativity of different interviewees, through their relationships. Of the interviewees who were in relationships at the time of our interviews, none were in primary relationships with men. Where women were in relationships with women, therefore, their non-heterosexuality was made visible. They would most likely be assumed to be lesbian, and so some felt the need to clarify that they were bisexual – such as Louise and Vera – while others did indeed identify as lesbian or as 'not-straight' – such as Gwen, Judith (b. 1954) and Elsa (b. 1951). For male interviewees, being in relationships with women meant that it was easier for them to 'pass' as straight in the context of their relationships. This may have made it feel more difficult and unnecessary to have the 'big conversation' in which they 'came out'.

While it does seem that bisexual men and men who were attracted to multiple genders were more likely to be 'closeted', I want to problematise some of the suggestions that were made in the 1970s and 1980s that this meant that they were 'cowardly' and not 'further[ing] the struggle', or that the closet was 'cosy' and comfortable. The written sources from the 1970s and 1980s, especially the 1980s, were oddly paradoxical in, on the one hand, their insistence that those who had not 'come out' were somehow privileged by their ability to 'pass' as straight and remain 'in their cosy closet', while on the other hand emphasising that being 'closeted' is akin to 'being half-alive', and 'coming out' would ease a significant psychological burden.[155] Being 'closeted' therefore seems to involve being the object of both scorn and pity.

In relation to my own interviewees, it can be difficult to determine their emotions around 'outness' and 'closetedness'. They generally did not try to reclaim 'closetedness' as empowering by echoing Chauncey's notion of the 'double life' being historically linked to 'freedom' rather than 'isolation'.[156] As stated above, those who had not 'come out' demonstrated some discomposure

[155] Baker, "The Closet", 15-16.
[156] Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 6-7.

about this – for example through defensiveness ('Why should I?') or nervous laughter.[157] However, it is unclear whether this was as a result of negative feelings about being 'in the closet', or because they were resisting mainstream narratives about 'coming out'. Psychological studies have generally found bisexual people to have higher rates of mental illness and suicidality than cisgender gay men and lesbians, which is often attributed to 'difficulty being open about their own sexuality' and 'stress built up from having to remain closeted'.[158] On the other hand, as Summerfield argues, the lack of 'social recognition' for a particular narrative may also produce discomposure – in this case, the lack of social recognition for choosing to remain 'closeted' may contribute to discomposure in the interviews, rather than or in addition to simply being 'closeted' in itself.[159]

The potential stresses of being 'closeted' do not necessarily support the liberationist idea that 'coming out' leads to the resolution of problems. It is worth remembering that, for some interviewees, 'coming out' *exacerbated* problems. For example, Ossian found it 'grossly disempowering', particularly in relation to his father's more negative response: 'he didn't actually understand […] he burst into tears'.[160] Vera remembered that 'coming out' to her mother 'really… made things very difficult at home', which led to her moving out 'as soon as I could'.[161] Perhaps the most negative experience of 'coming out' was related by Aidan when he 'came out' as trans to his mother and housemates while at university: his mother 'made it clear in no uncertain terms that, the family will completely disown me […] Er, and I was… quite, quite upset about it'.[162] He ended up 'back[ing] down' and detransitioning for over a decade.[163]

---

[157] Interview with Aidan, b. 1971, 22 June 2018; Interview with Neil (pseudonym), b. 1958, 26 September 2018.
[158] Anthony F. Jorm et al, "Sexual orientation and mental health: results from a community survey of young and middle-aged adults", *British Journal of Psychiatry* 180 (2002): 423 – 427; Mind, "Stand Bi Me: Information and guidance on how to support bisexual people", *mind*.org, 2016, 8 https://www.mind.org.uk/media/18833979/stand-bi-me.pdf.
[159] Summerfield, "Culture and Composure", 69.
[160] Interview with Ossian (pseudonym), b. 1954, 13 August 2018.
[161] Interview with Vera (pseudonym), b. 1960, 26 October 2018.
[162] Interview with Aidan, b. 1971, 22 June 2018.
[163] Interview with Aidan, b. 1971, 22 June 2018.

Trans 'coming out' narratives, such as that of Aidan or Chryssy (b. 1962), the other trans person I interviewed, are also significantly different from mainstream cisgender lesbian and gay discourses. For example, they can involve 'coming out' at multiple different points – such as before, during or after transitioning – when different approaches are required and the stakes can be quite different. Stacey M. Brumbaugh-Johnson and Kathleen E. Hull highlight that 'coming out' as trans 'is best conceptualised as an ongoing, socially embedded, skilled management of one's gender identity', rather than as a linear process.[164] Both Aidan and Chryssy also had multiple 'coming outs' in terms of their sexuality as well as their gender. Both highlighted their trans 'coming outs' as much more significant than 'coming out' as bisexual and pansexual – Chryssy said that her sexuality hadn't 'ever been an issue' – although their discussions of gender and sexuality were often closely linked.[165] The Hall-Carpenter interviewee, David/Della, might also be seen today as telling a trans 'coming out' narrative. Although he identified as a drag queen rather than trans at the time of his interview in 1994, and the interview was archived using he/him pronouns, it was also listed under the name 'David (Della)' and his interviewer referred to him as Della.[166] Again, his gender and sexuality were linked: he said that his mother 'must have known' he was gay, because he sometimes dressed in 'semi-drag' and had a very feminine appearance.[167]

Gender was therefore a key factor affecting interviewees' experience of and attitudes towards 'coming out'. Firstly, male interviewees were more likely than female interviewees to criticise 'coming out'. But interviewees' partners' genders, and the experience of 'coming out' as trans, were also significant factors complicating their narratives compared to the dominant 'coming out story'. In the next section I will discuss two other reasons behind the more complex 'coming out' narratives of bisexuals and people attracted to multiple genders. Firstly,

---

[164] Stacey M. Brumbaugh-Johnson and Kathleen E. Hull, "Coming Out as Transgender: Navigating the Social Implications of Transgender Identity", *Journal of Homosexuality* 66, no. 8 (2019): 1148.
[165] Interview with Chryssy, b. 1962, 12 September 2018.
[166] David (Della) McKenna, b. 1944, interviewed by EH, 27 January 1994, The British Library: HCA Oral History Project, C456/125.
[167] David (Della) McKenna, b. 1944, interviewed by EH, 27 January 1994, The British Library: HCA Oral History Project, C456/125.

interviewees' identities were themselves often complex and did not follow a linear pattern. Secondly, conventional gay and lesbian 'coming out stories' often ended in the resolution of problems through finding a community.[168] As discussed in Chapters One and Two, this was particularly difficult for bisexuals and those attracted to multiple genders because a coherent 'community' for bisexual people did not exist.

Identities and Communities

Most of my interviewees had identified in multiple different ways across the course of their lifetimes. Only six interviewees had identified the same way since youth, and one of them – Alison (b. 1967) – used a range of identity labels in different contexts ('in different contexts I would use bi, pan, *or* queer'), and so still did not fit a linear model of identity.[169] One interviewee (Curtis) identified as gay and then bisexual, and another (Louise) as lesbian and then bisexual.[170] For others, the situation was less clear: it was not evident from the interviews when Gwen, Ossian or Neil began identifying as bisexual, and although Gwen did not reject the term 'bisexual' she generally preferred to come out as gay or 'not-straight'.[171] The complexity of their identities meant that 'coming out' was inherently a continuous and non-linear process for many.

Of course, it is possible to tell a linear story of 'coming out' as bisexual after identifying as gay or lesbian – a story where gay or lesbian identity is a sort of 'false consciousness' before they 'discovered' their true selves. However, many interviewees explicitly rejected this narrative. After Curtis started having sex with women, he still saw himself as gay for some time: 'I don't think I even thought of the word [bisexual]'.[172] Chryssy described herself as having 'periods of – being gay, then being straight, and being gay, then being straight', while Vera's narrative was

---

[168] Plummer, *Telling Sexual Stories*, 83.
[169] Dave (b. 1960), Ian (b. 1962), Nigel (b. 1963) and Alison (b. 1967) had all identified as bisexual since youth; Judith (b. 1954) and Lisa (b. 1954) had identified as lesbian since youth. Here 'youth' is defined as teens or early twenties. Interview with Alison (pseudonym), b. 1967, 5 October 2018.
[170] Interview with Curtis (pseudonym), b. 1958, 24 July 2018; Interview with Louise, b. 1966, 27 July 2018.
[171] Interview with Gwen (pseudonym), b. 1951, 9 October 2018; Interview with Ossian (pseudonym), b. 1954, 13 August 2018; Interview with Neil (pseudonym), b. 1958, 26 September 2018.
[172] Interview with Curtis (pseudonym), b. 1958, 24 July 2018.

fundamentally non-linear: she 'came out' as bisexual, then as lesbian, and then as bisexual again.[173]

Some of Wolff's interviewees and the Hall-Carpenter interviewees did follow the structure of modernist 'coming out stories', such as Zahid (b. 1956), who said 'I always… fancied boys', and recounted phoning Gay Icebreakers and becoming involved in the gay community.[174] In the autobiographical excerpts selected by Wolff, the narrators always begin by describing their childhoods. Often these recollections of childhood do align with Plummer's description of an 'unhappy' childhood with a 'strong sense of difference', although this was more often talked about in terms of gender nonconformity rather than early attractions: Mildred said 'I was quite a tomboy', and Gordon described himself as 'a soft boy'.[175]

When they moved beyond the discussion of childhood, however, some of the Hall-Carpenter interviewees and Wolff's interviewees began to resist the conventional model of 'coming out stories'. For example, Bette (b. 1939), interviewed for the Hall-Carpenter project in 1994, playfully resisted the interviewer's encouragement to pinpoint a 'moment of realisation':

> *Interviewer*: So by the time you got to the Central [drama school], did, er, did you think – "right, I'm gay?"
>
> *Bette:* No, I thought "right, I'm posh!"
>
> *Interviewer*: Right, so your sexuality wasn't really an issue at that time, is that right?
>
> *Bette*: I was having a lot of sex with men, but, er – and I knew I was gay […] but I was also sleeping with women occasionally, and it hadn't sort of – I hadn't *politically* defined it until the 70s, really.
>
> *Interviewer*: No I don't really mean *politically*, but I suppose – in yourself?
>
> *Bette:* No.[176]

---

[173] Interview with Chryssy, b. 1962, 12 September 2018; Interview with Vera (pseudonym), b. 1960, 26 October 2018.
[174] Zahid Dar, b. 1956, interviewed by William Todd (WT), October 1985, The British Library: HCA Oral History Project, C456/19.
[175] Mildred, quoted in Wolff, *Bisexuality*, 160; Gordon, quoted in Wolff, *Bisexuality,* 187.
[176] Bette Bourne, b. 1939, interviewed by EH, 7 March 1994, The British Library: HCA Oral History Project, C456/126.

Many of these interviewees also related an ongoing sense of confusion about their identity, which was not neatly restricted to the 'closeted' past. Sue (b. 1964) talked about experiencing confusion due to a relationship with a man after she had 'come out' as lesbian: 'all these years I'd been a lesbian. And suddenly this bloke, splats right in the middle of my life and *confuses* everything'.[177] For some of Wolff's interviewees, too, confusion was a continual presence rather than being easily resolved. Mildred said 'I feel confused now. It's hard being bisexual […] This is confused, reflecting accurately my state of mind', while Audrey said that she had looked 'at my emotional pattern and wonder[ed] if I *am* really bisexual' and Ruth said 'more and more I think of myself as a lesbian and yet I'm writing to you as a bisexual partly to sort these things out'.[178] These 'coming out' narratives did not, therefore, achieve a satisfying conclusion.

In other examples of non-linear narratives of identity, the Hall-Carpenter interviewee Liz (b. 1962), talked about 'decid[ing] to become heterosexual' after initially 'coming out' as lesbian, 'because I was *pissed off* with women, and the gay scene'.[179] The lesbian community did not therefore provide a positive community for Liz, and in fact made her decide, not to 're-closet' herself, but to actively 'become heterosexual'. Sophie (b. 1957), meanwhile, rejected the idea of being 'born' lesbian, or having experienced any same-sex attraction in childhood at all: 'I'd never been attracted to women, at *all*. I mean, I'd never thought I would become a lesbian […] and I'm *sure* I wasn't squishing it down […] I think I just hadn't had the feeling'.[180]

As mentioned above, Gwen did not entirely reject the label of bisexuality, but said that she found it 'problematic'.[181] She also said that she tended to 'come out' to other people by referencing her female partner:

---

[177] Sue King, b. 1964, interviewed by MF, 5 December 1985, The British Library: HCA Oral History Project, C456/35.
[178] Mildred, quoted in Wolff, *Bisexuality,* 164-165; Audrey, quoted in Wolff, *Bisexuality,* 169; Ruth, quoted in Wolff, *Bisexuality*, 152.
[179] Liz Naylor, b. 1962, interviewed by MF, 11 March 1986, The British Library: HCA Oral History Project, C456/43.
[180] Sophie Laws, b. 1957, interviewed by MF, 8 June 1990, The British Library: HCA Oral History Project, C456/81.
[181] Interview with Gwen (pseudonym), b. 1951, 9 October 2018.

> I've not got to the point of saying "oh no I'm not straight, I'm bisexual". I've *never* really done that […] I could do. I *would* do, but… […] it was just – easier to sort of erm, correct the assumption [about her partner's gender], somehow. I can't believe I haven't come out as bisexual because it's – I don't know, I'm *scared* to. I'm not. Er, it's just I've always sort of wanted to… er, emphasise the fact that, erm… er… I'm not straight.[182]

Even though Gwen spoke about how she viewed 'coming out' to be a political necessity, her complicated relationship with the term 'bisexual' meant that she preferred to focus on making sure people knew she was 'not straight', rather than specifically bisexual.

Finally, although women were generally less likely than men to resist the 'disclosure imperative' to 'come out', they challenged mainstream 'coming out' narratives in other ways. For example, the political lesbian narrative of lesbian identity, which emphasised politics rather than attraction – 'because of the politics […] Because I'm a feminist' – resisted the modernist, essentialist narratives of 'discovering' an inherent 'truth' of identity.[183]

Interviewees' discussions of identity were therefore one way in which they challenged dominant 'coming out' narratives. Many people who were attracted to multiple genders had identified in multiple ways across their lifetimes, or expressed confusion about their identity which was not neatly or conveniently 'resolved'. This challenged linear narratives about the process of 'coming out'. Interviewees who were attracted to multiple genders but identified as gay or lesbian for political reasons also challenged essentialist 'coming out' narratives. These non-linear, non-essentialist experiences of identity were particularly common amongst bisexual interviewees and interviewees attracted to multiple genders, and so this is one reason why multiple-gender-attraction 'coming out stories' differed from the narratives found in gay and lesbian publications.

Another reason why interviewees challenged conventional 'coming out' narratives was due to the changing role of 'community' or 'communities'. As discussed above, much of the scholarship on 'coming out' emphasised the importance of finding community in contributing to

---

[182] Interview with Gwen (pseudonym), b. 1951, 9 October 2018.
[183] Interview with Judith (pseudonym), b. 1954, 11 October 2018.

a positive resolution of 'coming out stories', and gay liberation groups linked 'coming out' with 'coming together' as a gay community. However, as discussed in Chapter Two, many interviewees did not experience a coherent 'bisexual community' of which they either wanted or were able to become part.

Furthermore, as discussed in Chapter One, for interviewees who 'came out' as bisexual after identifying as lesbian or gay, 'coming out' as bisexual could lead to their being ostracised by the same people who had previously formed the supportive community that Plummer and others described. Louise said that 'most of my friends were fine', but she had 'one bad experience, with a really close friend, who really struggled with it', and one of her lesbian partners 'tried to create an environment where I *couldn't* say anything about it'.[184] Curtis said that telling gay friends he was bisexual was 'quite *awkward* […] you're almost like *guilty*, you know, a slight feeling of – it's, I still feel a bit uneasy about this –'.[185] For Vera, as well as being concerned about negative reactions, she also had to contend with potentially losing her home if she 'came out' as bisexual, because she lived in a lesbian-only co-operative at the time.[186]

For most of my interviewees, therefore, the modernist 'coming out narrative' analysed by Plummer was not applicable to their own understanding of their experiences, in part because the fourth and fifth step of finding a community was difficult or impossible. It was perhaps *particularly* difficult in the 1970s and 1980s, at least as some of my interviewees remembered it, but this was also the case for some interviewees as late as 2018 and 2019.

Conclusion

The attitudes towards 'coming out' in the personal narratives of those attracted to multiple genders that I have analysed – my own oral history interviews, the Hall-Carpenter oral history interviews, and the interviews and autobiographies of Wolff's study subjects – clearly

[184] Interview with Louise, b. 1966, 27 July 2018.
[185] Interview with Curtis (pseudonym), b. 1958, 24 July 2018.
[186] Interview with Vera (pseudonym), b. 1960, 26 October 2018.

differ from the emphasis on its importance in the gay press and publications. When these narratives are contrasted as I have done here, the pronouncements by Baker and others that 'I have never come across one convincing argument for staying in the closet' start to seem defensive, and the efforts to rebut criticisms of 'coming out' suggest that people were making these criticisms during the 1970s and 1980s, but were generally not given a platform to do so.[187]

Compared to the mainstream narratives of 'coming out' in published sources, interviewees tended to demonstrate more negative or ambivalent feelings about the concept of 'coming out'. This was particularly the case for men who identified as bisexual. Women who were attracted to multiple genders were more likely to emphasise the political importance of 'coming out', but their identities – often multiple, non-linear, or political – meant that their 'coming out stories' also differed from linear and essentialist narratives about discovering a 'truth'. The lack of a coherent community for those attracted to multiple genders suggests that they were also more likely to question 'coming out stories' which emphasised finding a supportive community as a positive final stage.

The slightly more ambivalent attitudes displayed in the *Bi-Monthly* article on 'coming out' lend credence to the idea that bisexuals and people attracted to multiple genders were generally more able to resist the 'disclosure imperative' than gay men and lesbians who were attracted to one gender – that is, it was not just a difference between published and 'personal' sources, but between people who were attracted to multiple genders and those who were not. At the same time, many of these phenomena also apply to other groups – most obviously trans people and people of colour – and their 'coming out stories' also differed from the primarily cisgender and white conventional narrative. The key contributory factors in resisting the 'disclosure imperative' were lack of coherent community, lack of visibility, and understandings of their own identity that did not fit a linear narrative. These were particularly important for the bisexual men I

[187] Baker, "The Closet", 15.

interviewed, but were not exclusive to them.

Although I began this chapter addressing the exhortations to 'come out' made in the 1970s and 1980s, my interviewees' more complex feelings about 'coming out' expressed in the late 2010s were generally *not* the result of a wider cultural change in attitudes. Many popular discourses today still emphasise the 'necessity' of 'coming out', and the benefits that it will supposedly bring to the individual and the 'LGBTQ community'. The evidence of my own interviews on this subject is also broadly consistent with the interviews conducted by Wolff in the 1970s and the Hall-Carpenter Archives Oral History Project in the 1980s and 1990s. As Mills found in relation to women's memories of the 'swinging sixties', interviewees could use their own experiences to critique mainstream discourses.[188]

Boyd expresses concern about her interviewees undermining her efforts to 'queer' oral history by re-centring 'gay identity as the space from which they could speak about themselves'.[189] Her analysis of personal narratives being 'structured around a certain historical desire for gay and lesbian political visibility' presents important questions about the difficulties and limitations of queer oral history projects.[190] However, my own experience of analysing personal narratives about bisexuality and multiple-gender-attraction shows that these interviewees, without necessarily intending to do so, *did* find ways to articulate their experiences outside dominant narratives of 'coming out'.

[188] Mills, "Using the personal", 463-483.
[189] Boyd, "Who is the subject?", 188.
[190] Boyd, "Who is the subject?", 189.

Chapter Four

Relationships and Attraction

Their attractions – that is, their capacity to be attracted to more than one gender – is what links my interviewees, Charlotte Wolff's interviewees, and the selection of Hall-Carpenter interviewees that this thesis addresses, and differentiates them from others who were attracted to one gender. However, in contrast to discussions about 'coming out', there were no specific 'bisexual narratives' about attraction and relationships. Rather, these narratives show differences over *time*, especially in their approach to the gender binary. While sources in the 1970s differentiated sharply between the genders of potential partners, my interviewees in the late 2010s argued that gender differences did *not* play a role in their attraction or experiences of relationships – even when they were reflecting back on the 1970s and 1980s. In these changing discussions, we can see some of the effects of the 1970s and 1980s criticisms of bisexuality, in that interviewees in the present day were more reluctant to appear highly-sexual by associating bisexuality and non-monogamy, or appear misogynistic by endorsing binary gender roles.

The historiography of love and relationships in modern Britain has been dominated by a focus on heterosexuality. Claire Langhamer in *The English in Love* states simply that 'homosexual love lies beyond [her book's] remit', while Marcus Collins's focus on mutuality in *Modern Love* 'excludes homosexuals from consideration except where, as in the case of lesbian separatists […] they directly challenged heterosexual norms'.[1] When these histories do address queer relationships, they are often discussed in isolation from heterosexual relationships, with relatively little attention to the interactions between the two or the possibility of relationships with multiple genders. Histories of queer and LGBT activism, meanwhile, have rarely focussed on romantic and sexual relationships amongst their subjects, with the notable exception of Matt Cook's work on queer domesticities.[2] These historiographical patterns reflect and reinforce,

[1] Langhamer, *The English in Love*, 4; Collins, *Modern Love*, 9.
[2] Cook, *Queer Domesticities.*

albeit inadvertently, wider assumptions that homosexual couples did not experience or value romantic love to the same extent as heterosexual couples. In the 1970s and 1980s, homophiles sought to dispel this assumption – 'it is essential to demonstrate that homosexuals are capable of conducting their lives responsibly, and have the same potential to establish stable relationships as heterosexuals' – while radical liberationists attempted to embrace it – 'I'm not into all these institutions of patriarchy […] we're not just talking about the big one of marriage, we're [also] talking about the couple', '[homosexual] pair-bonds that fail usually do so because the pair have attempted an imitation of heterosexual marriage'.[3] Bisexuals and people attracted to multiple genders were not acknowledged in these binary distinctions, and do not fit into them.

Those attracted to multiple genders defy the binaries of heterosexual and homosexual relationships by being able to experience apparently 'gay' and apparently 'straight' relationships, or even both at the same time. As Clare Hemmings argues, the bisexual subject therefore 'cannot be structurally produced or endorsed through gender of sexual object choice' – 'the sex or gender of object choice cannot signify bisexuality'.[4] As discussed in Chapter One, gay liberationists and lesbian feminists attempted to resolve this problem by forcing bisexuals into a binary based on 'primary' attraction to either men or women.[5] While previous chapters have focussed on the implications of this for bisexual politics, communities and identities, in this chapter I will focus on the implications for how people attracted to multiple genders narrated their most personal, intimate stories of relationships and attraction. In so doing, I seek to bring together the disparate histories of (implicitly heterosexual) relationships and (implicitly single) queers. This challenges narratives of heterosexual love and marriage that cast the late twentieth century as a period of consistent, steady decline in long-term relationships and marriage after a 'golden age' of mutuality and romance in the mid-century.[6] There was in fact a significant amount of change

[3] Stafford, "Morality", 3; Interview with Ossian (pseudonym), b. 1954, 13 August 2018; Baker, "Gay Lifestyle", 1973 discussion paper, 4-5, LSE: HCA/CHE/8/2. Both Martin Stafford and Roger Baker were involved in C.H.E., reflecting the wide range of perspectives contained within the Campaign.
[4] Hemmings, *Bisexual Spaces*, 27, 24.
[5] Interview with Lisa, b. 1954, 4 April 2019.
[6] Langhamer, *The English in Love*, 11; Collins, *Modern Love*, 167.

between the 1970s and the present day, which cannot be characterised simply as a 'decline' in marriage and relationships. Monogamy was more highly-prized by twenty-first century interviewees than their 1970s and 1980s counterparts, and they were more likely to link their experience of relationships to their identity.

Bisexuality's refusal of the binaries of 'gay' and 'straight' relationships and attraction does not mean that they eschewed binaries altogether. Interviewees in the 1970s and 1980s as well as the twenty-first century wrestled with binary understandings of attraction – usually classifying attraction as either sexual or romantic, in a way that was often gendered. Other binaries were also invoked, such as between 'people' (which could include personalities or minds) and 'bodies' (which could also include appearance and genitalia). Behaviour and identity was another distinction that interviewees explored, as well as juxtaposing identities that were perceived as more 'political' and those that were more 'authentic'. Another distinction was between attraction and relationships: not all attractions were acted upon, and experiences in relationships were often quite different to the more abstract ideals of attraction. In general, those attracted to multiple genders interviewed in the 1970s and 1980s tended to focus more on experiences of relationships, while interviewees in the late 2010s focussed more on attraction.

In this chapter I focus on the changing ways in which relationships and attraction were discussed in the 1970s, 1980s, and today. I will begin by examining the interview contexts and the ways in which these may or may not have contributed to changing narratives of relationships and attraction. I will then investigate the specific nature of these changes, including the binary distinctions discussed above, followed by the broader social and political shifts away from strict gender divisions and towards closer connection between an individual's identity and their experience of relationships. These broader shifts offer the most persuasive explanation for *why* bisexual narratives of relationships and attraction changed over time.

Interview Contexts

There were significant differences in narratives about relationships and attraction

between sources from the 1970s and 1980s, and sources from the present day. However, the nature of oral history interviewing means that the temporalities at play are less clear-cut than this framing suggests. Although I will focus primarily on Wolff's interviews from the 1970s and the Hall-Carpenter interviews from the 1980s and 1990s as sources for 'late-twentieth-century' attitudes and my own interviews as sources for the 'present-day', it should be remembered that my interviewees were specifically asked to reflect back on the 1970s and 1980s. Their memories also form part of the evidence about those decades, which complicates the assessment of change over time.

However, as Langhamer argues, 'historical moment, gender, status, marital circumstance, and generation shaped understandings of love'.[7] For my interviewees, the 'historical moment' in which they were speaking – that is, the late 2010s – affected their perceptions of and narratives about the earlier period they were remembering, although the specific nature of this varied according to a multitude of other factors such as gender, experience of relationships, and interactions with lesbian, gay and bisexual politics. I will discuss these dynamics in greater detail in the next chapter, on popular memory. Although oral history interviewees did not straightforwardly reflect the context in which they were speaking, there were significant differences between interviewees speaking in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, and those speaking in the late 2010s, even when they were discussing the same period.

It could be argued that these differences were less as a result of changing historical contexts and more due to the different interview scenarios themselves. The role of Wolff in influencing and editing her subjects' interviews and autobiographies is difficult to determine, although in the interview extracts she appears to question people quite directly and specifically about their attractions and relationships: 'Do you think you could love from a distance, unrequitedly?', 'I know that you have a good marriage, though with considerable problems. Can you tell me more about this and your husband?', 'Did you fall in love with men *and* women?', 'Do

[7] Langhamer, *The English in Love*, 8.

you come into conflict about the two different kinds of love?'.[8] The interviewers on the Hall-Carpenter project tended to ask more broad and open-ended questions, such as 'How were things, with you and [your partner]?'.[9] When conducting my own interviews, I also tried to ask quite broad and open-ended questions, but I was also conscious in some situations of the personal and fraught nature of interviewees' relationship histories. As a relatively new and inexperienced interviewer, my questioning often reflected a discomfort with this. In three of the interviews where interviewees were discussing different experiences of relationships, I self-consciously moderated my questioning in order to seem less intrusive, which may have affected the way in which interviewees responded.

For example, in the third interview of the project, with Curtis (b. 1958), I asked 'I just wondered if – you know, if you'd feel comfortable talking about your relationship history, the different relationships you've been in, kind of – you don't have to go into *loads* of detail'.[10] Curtis had not discussed his relationships before that point, and it took another question: 'Erm – so, the long-term relationships you have been in, have they mostly been with men, or has it been kind of a mix, or – ?' before he mentioned his marriage and separation, which he requested be omitted from the archived version of the interview recording and transcript. Michael Roper writes about the importance of oral historians paying attention to the psychoanalytical concepts of 'transference' and 'counter-transference' in the interview scenario.[11] 'Transference' concerns the ways in which the 'emotional residues of the past' are brought into present encounters, while 'counter-transference' focusses on the feelings of the analyst, and how they respond to the patient's feelings – 'how the patient is acting upon the analyst, and for what reasons'.[12] Although oral history interviews do not serve a therapeutic purpose, the discussion of interviewees' life experiences, particularly ones that provoke discomposure, may cause the interviewer to

[8] Wolff, *Bisexuality*, 112, 115, 116, 121.
[9] Liz Kelly, b. 1951, interviewed by MF, 16 March 1991, The British Library: HCA Oral History Project, C456/105.
[10] Interview with Curtis (pseudonym), b. 1958, 24 July 2018.
[11] Roper, "Analysing the Analysed", 20-32.
[12] Roper, "Analysing the Analysed", 21.

experience counter-transference in the form of anxieties and internal conflicts 'brought alive by the material in the interview'.[13] In Roper's case, he speculates that his feelings of discomfort and anxiety in one particular interview scenario could have been as a result of his fear of having offended the interviewee, but could also have been prompted by the interviewee's transference towards him: 'I had an acute sense of the intrusiveness of my endeavour […] it would be difficult for her to traverse this past without to some extent *re-encountering* [difficult feelings]'.[14] In the interview with Curtis, I believe that my reassurance that he did not 'have to' go into detail illustrates counter-transference caused by his discomposure about his past relationship, and the difficult emotions that still surrounded it.[15]

In my fifth interview, with Chryssy (b. 1962), I also reassured her that she did not have to be 'specific, if you don't want to' when asking about her relationships.[16] When I said this, I already knew that she had been married and divorced. The phrasing of my question was thus in part a result of my remembering the interview with Curtis, the only other person I had interviewed at that point who had been married and separated, and anticipating discomposure from Chryssy.

This issue arose for the final time in the interview with Alison (b. 1967), the seventh interview of the project, when I told her:

> Another of the areas I'm interested in is like relationships and – and stuff like that, and obviously you don't have to go into lots of detail about things if you don't want to, but erm – and also obviously you mentioned being polyamorous, and I was wondering if you could talk a bit about relationships in relation to that, and across your lifetime –[17]

This question came directly after Alison had mentioned in a fairly off-hand manner that, in addition to her current marriage, 'I have been married before'.[18] This revelation came as a surprise, close to the end of the interview. Although I wanted to know more, I was again concerned about seeming overly-intrusive. In her answer, Alison also stated that 'I'm comfortable

---

[13] Roper, "Analysing the Analysed", 22.
[14] Roper, "Analysing the Analysed", 25. Emphasis in original.
[15] Summerfield, "Culture and Composure", 66.
[16] Interview with Chryssy, b. 1962, 12 September 2018.
[17] Interview with Alison (pseudonym), b. 1967, 5 October 2018.
[18] Interview with Alison (pseudonym), b. 1967, 5 October 2018.

with [being polyamorous] within myself, I'm not always comfortable talking to other people about it?'. [19] As I will discuss below, Alison was concerned that her polyamory might support negative stereotypes about bisexuality. It is possible that I unconsciously picked up on this discomfort, and that counter-transference occurred in my awkward questioning.

It is also important to note that, in the interviews where I did *not* tell interviewees that they 'don't have to go into *loads* of detail', I still received responses which were very generalised and vague. For example, Neil (b. 1958) briskly covered 'twenty years in a flash' when discussing his marriage:

> We lived together. And then we got married a year later. […] Bought a house in West London. And we were there for... er, twenty years. Or something - So then I was married, erm, two children - had a third child in '99, erm, so three children, and grew up in - you know, they went to school in West London, and I was - you know, married. Now during this time - so I was in a - then, I'd married, and in a relationship […] Yeah, so that, erm... took me through - that's taken - so that's twenty years in a flash [*both laugh*].[20]

Although it is impossible to know the extent to which different interviewers' approaches affected the stories about relationships and attraction that their interviewees narrated, I would argue that the differences in my interviews in the late 2010s cannot *solely* or even primarily be attributed to my style of questioning. Although many of the interviewees may have spoken in less detail about their relationships because I did not want to press them for specifics, on related topics such as identity and gender differences in attraction I was careful not to ask leading questions, and interviewees also often spoke about these topics unprompted. I would therefore argue that changing attitudes towards promiscuity, gender differences and the gender binary, which were linked to criticisms of bisexuality and multiple-gender-attraction, were the key factor in informing very different narratives about relationships and attraction amongst present-day interviewees compared to their 1970s and 1980s counterparts.

---

[19] Interview with Alison (pseudonym), b. 1967, 5 October 2018.
[20] Interview with Neil (pseudonym), b. 1958, 26 September 2018.

Remembering Relationships and Attraction

Monogamy and Non-Monogamy

As discussed in Chapter Two, bisexuality and attraction to multiple genders was often hyper-sexualised. One of the ways in which this occurred was an assumption that bisexuality required non-monogamous relationships. For example, Lisa (b. 1954), said that during the 1970s and 1980s 'the popular idea of somebody who was bisexual was that […] you were *actively* sexual with both sexes'.[21] This also makes sense given the binary understandings of gay and straight identity prevalent in the gay liberation movement, discussed in Chapter One: if someone in a mixed-gender relationship was seen as possessing the privileges of heterosexuality, and someone in a same-gender relationship was seen as oppressed due to gay oppression, bisexuality – or 'active' bisexuality at least – could only be understood as someone engaging in multiple simultaneous relationships with different genders.

The authors of seven out of the nine autobiographical excerpts published in Wolff's *Bisexuality: A Study* were in non-monogamous relationships. These generally seemed to be accepted or at least tolerated by all parties in the relationship: one of Charles's partners 'was extremely supportive and encouraged [his] relationship' with another man, while Mildred wrote about meeting another partner at a party: 'BANG went two and a half years' dreary monogamy […] no jealousy'.[22] Penelope and her partner 'never thought seriously of leaving our husbands, for we both value our marriages […] Andrew has been remarkably understanding about it all, and even Arthur has come to accept it'.[23] Gordon wrote that his wife 'does not object to my having relationships with men'.[24] Although Wolff's interviewees did not explicitly link bisexuality to non-monogamy, statements such as 'I would counter each homosexual experience with a heterosexual one' suggest that the two were associated, and non-monogamy with multiple genders was seen

[21] Interview with Lisa, b. 1954, 4 April 2019.
[22] Charles, quoted in Wolff, *Bisexuality*, 185; Mildred, quoted in Wolff, *Bisexuality*, 161.
[23] Penelope, quoted in Wolff, *Bisexuality,* 157.
[24] Gordon, quoted in Wolff, *Bisexuality*, 191.

as a way of being 'actively' bisexual.[25]

The 'mixed marriages' discussed in *Gay News* could also be seen as an example of non-monogamy. In some cases – such as that of 'Jane Smith', who wanted a divorce, this was non-consensual and unethical: 'My own preference would be to obtain a divorce as quickly as possible under the clause "unnatural behaviour" […] What is unnatural to me is that my chosen partner can claim to have true affection for me […] while stating that he should be free to make close relationships with gays'.[26]

In other instances, however, such as Ray Edwards' marriage to his second wife, Penny, the non-monogamy seems more consensual and bound by explicit, mutually-agreed ethical standards: 'they are separate, in the sense that each feels free to take lovers, together in that they bring their lovers to the house and offer them the opportunity to share in its life […] Each of them believes strongly that openness is the thing that has enabled their marriage to go on functioning'.[27]. Fran Stratford, who wrote a column in *Gay News* about 'coming out' as bisexual, wrote: 'I now have a fairly happy, stable, almost non-sexual relationship with my second husband who is bisexual […] I found, fairly early on in the marriage, that it was impossible to exist trying to bury my homosexuality, trying to be "normal", and my husband has accepted this to a certain degree'.[28] Stratford had a female lover, one of her neighbours:

> I discovered that she too had bisexual feelings […] Her husband is completely heterosexual but has proved more co-operative than mine has been at times, perhaps being convinced from the very beginning of my relationship with his wife that whatever he said wouldn't change our feelings and also that, with three children between us, we were hardly likely to elope![29]

In the 1970s, Sue Spicer, a bisexual woman writing in *Gay News*, also associated bisexuality with non-monogamy, but focussed on the radical 'challenge' that it posed: 'the desire

---

[25] Charles, quoted in Wolff, *Bisexuality*, 175.
[26] Smith, "A Good Front", 17.
[27] Alison Hennegan, "Ray & Penny", *Gay News*, January 1978, 20.
[28] Fran Stratford, "Coming Out", *Gay News*, June 1977, 13.
[29] Stratford, "Coming Out", 13.

to have lovers of both sexes is an uncompromising challenge to the ethic of monogamy – more so than total homosexuality'.[30] As discussed in Chapter Two, this was part of an effort to re-interpret the links between bisexuality and promiscuity to argue for a 'radical' politics of bisexuality.

However, over the course of the 1980s, due in large part to the AIDS epidemic and concerns about bisexuals as 'disease vectors', this approach was discredited and the links between bisexuality and non-monogamy were criticised rather than accepted, much less celebrated. One article in *Bi-Monthly* in 1988 pleaded with readers: 'Just because I'm bisexual don't assume I'm a slag!', and emphasised 'I'm not into group sex, threesomes or foursomes! […] I'm actually married, so I'm not interested in other men purely for sex'.[31] At the same time, the writer also mentioned that she had a girlfriend, presumably in addition to her marriage, which could suggest that certain types of non-monogamy within limits were acceptable in the 1980s even as promiscuity and 'group sex' were being disavowed. Another article in *Bi-Monthly* expressed concern that the term bisexual 'implies that sex and maybe sex only is taking place between two or more people, involving both sexes'.[32] This association between bisexuality and non-monogamy was dismissed as a 'misunderstanding of bisexuality'.[33] However, the concern with this 'misunderstanding' seems mostly in relation to the suggestion that non-monogamy might involve 'sex only' rather than 'the complexity of emotions and needs'.[34] By the mid- to late-1980s we therefore see efforts to move away from the characterisation of non-monogamy and bisexuality discussed in the 1970s. While non-monogamy in itself was not necessarily seen as a problem, the links to promiscuity and the sexualisation of bisexuality were.

Some of my interviewees were also in non-monogamous relationships in the 2010s. Three interviewees described themselves as polyamorous and were currently in more than one

[30] Spicer, "Minimising", 14.
[31] Vi, "Just because I'm bisexual don't assume I'm a slag!", *Bi-Monthly*, October 1988, 19.
[32] John Barker, "Beyond Roles – Part Two", *Bi-Monthly*, May – June 1984, 2.
[33] Barker, "Beyond Roles", 2.
[34] Barker, "Beyond Roles", 2.

relationship.[35] One interviewee was in a relationship at the time of our interview, but occasionally went to sex clubs with his partner where they would 'play' with other people.[36] Three other interviewees had previously been non-monogamous but this was no longer the case at the time of our interview.[37]

Gwen (b. 1951) had been non-monogamous during the 1970s: 'living with a *man*, but I had gay *affairs* […] it was a very strange set-up, really'.[38] At the end of the 1970s, however, she met a woman with whom she was in a thirty-year, monogamous relationship until her partner's death: 'when I met [my partner] I think I knew this was actually – somebody I wanted to – hold on to, and not risk hurting […] she wouldn't have tolerated me having affairs, or – and I didn't want to, anyway, then. I'd sort of been there, done that'.[39] The connections that Gwen made between bisexuality and non-monogamy were so strong that she explicitly said that one of the reasons she generally did not identify as bisexual was because 'you can't be *actively* bisexual, if you're going to commit to monogamy'.[40] During her monogamous relationship, she said that 'bisexuality was a bit of a hypothetical state', although she then corrected herself: 'But it's not just about sexual attraction, is it? It's about being open to relationships with men and women, I think'.[41] Despite this clarification, though, Gwen's other comments suggested that being 'open to relationships' and 'actively bisexual' was fundamentally incompatible with monogamy.

However, other interviewees, particularly those who identified as bisexual, attempted to disassociate bisexuality and non-monogamy. They specifically rejected the view that Gwen took, that monogamy and bisexuality were inherently incompatible. Even those who were themselves in non-monogamous relationships emphasised that their personal experience of relationships

---

[35] Interview with Alison (pseudonym), b. 1967, 5 October 2018; Interview with Vera (pseudonym), b. 1960, 26 October 2018; Interview with Chryssy, b. 1962, 12 September 2018.
[36] Interview with Neil (pseudonym), b. 1958, 26 September 2018.
[37] Interview with Gwen (pseudonym), b. 1951, 9 October 2018; Interview with Judith (pseudonym), b. 1954, 11 October 2018; Interview with Ossian (pseudonym), b. 1954, 13 August 2018.
[38] Interview with Gwen (pseudonym), b. 1951, 9 October 2018.
[39] Interview with Gwen (pseudonym), b. 1951, 9 October 2018.
[40] Interview with Gwen (pseudonym), b. 1951, 9 October 2018.
[41] Interview with Gwen (pseudonym), b. 1951, 9 October 2018.

should not be used to reinforce 'stereotypes' of non-monogamous bisexuals. Alison said 'I'm not always comfortable talking to other people about it? Because – it plays into some of those stereotypes, about what being bi means'.[42] Vera (b. 1960) stressed that 'I *do* not have a girlfriend and boyfriend because… I'm *bi* […] I'm not polyamorous because I'm bi'.[43]

The attitudes towards non-monogamy expressed by interviewees in the present day were therefore in stark contrast to the attitudes of many bisexuals in the 1970s, who embraced non-monogamy as a positive challenge to hegemonic structures. This challenges Langhamer's argument that long-term monogamous relationships were in decline from the 1970s onwards – monogamy was more highly-valued by my interviewees in the late 2010s than by bisexuals in 1970s and 1980s sources.[44] This also demonstrates the impact of the sexualisation of bisexuality discussed in Chapter Two. Bisexual interviewees who were non-monogamous were keen to emphasise that their non-monogamy was not connected to their sexuality, because they were concerned that this could be used to hyper-sexualise, and thus dismiss, all those who were attracted to multiple genders. Critiques of bisexuality as overly-sexual and a threat to monogamy therefore affected how individual bisexuals thought about and discussed their relationships in the present day.

Gender

In the 1970s, bisexuals and people attracted to multiple genders often differentiated between 'sexual' and 'emotional' attraction. This division was closely tied to a binary view of gender difference. In most cases, feelings for women were described as more 'emotional' or romantic, referring to 'love' and 'closeness'. Feelings for men, by contrast, were more likely to be associated with 'desire' than love, and their sexual dimension was emphasised. Langhamer argues that mid-twentieth-century advice on heterosexual relationships also highlighted gender

[42] Interview with Alison (pseudonym), b. 1967, 5 October 2018.
[43] Interview with Vera (pseudonym), b. 1960, 26 October 2018.
[44] Langhamer, *The English in Love*, 210.

differences in emotion – female love was portrayed as more 'deep' and lasting, and often separated from sex, whereas male love was more 'shallow' and often conflated with sex.[45] Amongst people attracted to multiple genders in the 1970s, this emphasis was shifted slightly – it was feelings *for* women that were more 'emotional', not the feelings experienced *by* women – but still played into a longer history of the desexualisation of women and the sexualisation of men. This longer history enabled gay liberationists and lesbian feminists to suggest that bisexuality was more closely linked to heterosexuality and 'straight' gender stereotyping than it was to gay and lesbian politics, and thus to reject bisexuality as 'basically' straight and fundamentally sexist.

All three of the interviewees Wolff included in her selected interview transcripts described their feelings towards women as more 'emotional' and less 'sexual' than their feelings for men. Alan stated: 'I find it easier to love a woman than a man, but more laborious to have sexual relations with her […] I find men sexually, and women emotionally, more exciting'.[46] An anonymous 'meticulously dressed man' said 'I am closer to women […] I do love women, and not men', while 'Mrs B' said 'I don't *really* enjoy sex with a female. But I love them emotionally more than I could love a man'.[47] This distinction was also evident in some of the autobiographies Wolff published – for example, Gordon stated that 'I do not fall in love with men, only desire them'.[48] Only one of Wolff's sources explicitly differentiated between genders in a different way – Mildred was more emotionally attracted to men ('my main emotional ties were to men') and more sexually attracted to women ('I do prefer women's bodies to men's').[49]

Colin MacInnes, in *Loving Them Both*, also took up the issue of gendered types of attraction. He argued that a bisexual man would generally have 'emotional-sexual' relationships with women, whereas a bisexual man's 'promiscuous-sexual' activity would be directed towards

---

[45] Langhamer, *The English in Love*, 36.
[46] Alan, quoted in Wolff, *Bisexuality*, 121.
[47] Anonymous 'meticulously dressed man', quoted in Wolff, *Bisexuality*, 112; 'Mrs B', quoted in Wolff, *Bisexuality*, 116.
[48] Gordon, quoted in Wolff, *Bisexuality*, 192.
[49] Mildred, quoted in Wolff, *Bisexuality*, 162-165.

other men.[50] This slightly differed from Wolff's interviewees, in that MacInnes suggested it was *mixed-gender* relationships between men and women that were more 'serious' and 'emotional' – whereas Wolff's interviewees, both men and women, generally agreed that it was simply relationships *with women* that were more emotional. MacInnes argued that mixed-gender relationships were more emotional because 'the idea, if not the fact, of the creation of life is always hovering over the encounter', whereas 'homosexual encounters' did not have this same 'drama' and so were less emotionally-weighted.[51] At the same time, he also seemed to blur the distinctions between relationships *with men* and same-gender relationships, by assuming that all 'homosexual encounters' were those that took place between men. He used the term '"female" homosexual' to refer not to lesbians, but to feminised 'passive' homosexuals – 'those whose behaviour [during sex] is always "female"', blurring the distinctions between gender and sexual behaviour still further.[52] MacInnes's acknowledgment of lesbians was limited to the observation that 'true homosexual women' were 'gloomy'.[53]

MacInnes and Wolff's interviewees explicitly identified as bisexual during the 1970s. However, it was not only those who identified as bisexual who differentiated between their attraction to men and women during this period. This was also a dominant theme in the discussion of 'mixed marriages' between partners of differing sexualities. For the gay or bisexual partner in these marriages, differentiating between different types of attraction was the key explanatory factor for why these marriages happened, or why they continued. Peter Elers described feeling 'affectionate' but not 'sexual' towards his wife in 1977: 'I got married because I found someone with whom I had a very deep and lasting affectionate relationship. And it's mutual. It's not a sexual attraction'.[54] In 1978, Ray Edwards described his feelings for his first wife as 'genuine love', but added that 'one can't measure these things. One has a degree of passion and

[50] MacInnes, *Loving Them Both*, 9.
[51] MacInnes, *Loving Them Both*, 10-11.
[52] MacInnes, *Loving Them Both*, 13.
[53] MacInnes, *Loving Them Both*, 24-25.
[54] Howes, "A Matter of Conscience", 21.

one doesn't know that it's a little bit and not a large lump'.[55] Edwards's use of the term 'love' connotes romantic or emotional feelings, whereas 'passion' suggests sexual desire. It is worth noting that, of the non-heterosexual partners featured in *Gay News* explicitly discussing 'mixed marriages', all were gay men apart from Edwards, who said that he considered himself 'really bisexual and not 100% gay'.[56]

This emphasis on gender differences seems to have become less pronounced by the mid-1980s. John Barker, writing in *Bi-Monthly* in 1984, acknowledged that 'it is much easier for women' to be affectionate and emotional than for men, but unlike 1970s sources he did not explicitly suggest that relationships with women were therefore more emotional.[57] Rather, he moved beyond a binary of 'sexual' and 'emotional' to discuss 'emotional, sensual or sexual involvement', and argued that the presence of one or more of these types of involvement with 'either' gender would characterise bisexuality.[58] In a later article, he reiterated this tripartite understanding of attraction, and said that although this may vary between genders, it was not a stable binary division: 'This attraction may be in one or more ways, e.g. emotional, sexual, sensual. It may not be as strong for one sex as the other, may or may not shift […] during the course of a person's life, and may or may not be acted upon'.[59] Another *Bi-Monthly* article, on 'Definitions of Bisexuality' could be seen as reiterating gender differences, because its author rejected the idea that 'bisexuals really don't mind which gender their sexual partners are', arguing that this definition was too-specific and there were bisexuals for whom gender *was* an important factor in attraction.[60] However, the preferred definition of bisexuality she suggested instead – 'bisexuals recognise, both in theory and practice, the values of close relationships with those of either sex' – was chosen precisely because it emphasised *both* sexual and emotional attraction for partners,

[55] Hennegan, "Ray and Penny", 19.
[56] Hennegan, "Ray and Penny", 20.
[57] John Barker, "Loving Both Equally", *Bi-Monthly*, January 1984, 9.
[58] Barker, "Loving Both Equally", 9.
[59] Barker, "Beyond Roles", 1.
[60] Hilary, "Definitions of Bisexuality", *Bi-Monthly*, March 1984, 5.

which was not divided along gender lines.[61] There was not a complete rejection of the role of gender differences in attraction, then, but a move away from the strict binaries that characterised 1970s sources.

By the time of my interviews in the late 2010s, the move away from gender differentiation that was beginning to take place in 1980s sources had become the dominant perspective. The impact of a potential partner's gender on attraction came up with fourteen of the seventeen interviewees. In half of these cases, interviewees told me their feelings without being directly asked, and in the other half I specifically asked them whether they believed their feelings towards partners or potential partners differed according to gender. Their responses showed a marked contrast to earlier sources, emphasising that their feelings did *not* differ according to gender. Many argued that they 'really don't mind which gender their sexual partners are' – the idea expressly rejected by the 1984 *Bi-Monthly* article.[62] For example, Curtis said 'I can't distinguish, in that respect […] I could get *romantically* attached to a male or female'.[63] Alison reiterated at numerous points in the interview that 'there's no difference in how I feel […] their gender doesn't matter to me'.[64]

One exception to this was Neil, who said that his feelings towards men and women *did* differ. Like most 1970s sources, he said that he saw men in a sexual but not a romantic way: 'men, for me, was – it's a sexual thing […] I probably still can't now, envisage having a – a relationship with a man. Sex, yes, but not a relationship'.[65] He added that he only found men attractive 'in that sexual situation', rather than in general.[66] The difference between Neil and the other interviewees could perhaps be attributed to the fact that he was probably the least involved in bisexual politics or bisexual communities, as discussed in Chapter Two. This was in contrast to Alison, for example,

[61] Hilary, "Definitions", 6.
[62] Hilary, "Definitions", 5.
[63] Interview with Curtis (pseudonym), b. 1958, 24 July 2018.
[64] Interview with Alison (pseudonym), b. 1967, 5 October 2018.
[65] Interview with Neil (pseudonym), b. 1958, 26 September 2018.
[66] Interview with Neil (pseudonym), b. 1958, 26 September 2018.

who ran a local bisexual group, attended a bisexual group in another city and was a trustee of her local LGBTQ charity. Of all the people I interviewed, she was the most emphatic about her attraction being 'regardless of gender'.[67] Alison's view was more typical of twenty-first century bisexual politics, because she was more actively engaged in these discussions and debates.

Another interviewee, Nigel (b. 1963), said that his attitudes towards gender in relationships had changed over time. In the past he had differing experiences of relationships based on his partners' gender: 'women I could have an emotional attachment to […] and men it was just sexual'.[68] However, he said that his feelings had changed over the last twenty-five years: 'the more I'm able to tell people that I'm bi as well, and been open with it, the more I'm sort of comfortable with the fact I, I can have an emotional relationship with a man as well'.[69] Nigel therefore linked his changing sense of confidence in his identity, specifically his level of 'outness' as bisexual, with his changing attitudes towards gender in relationships. This narrative relegates differentiating between genders in relationships to the less 'enlightened', 'closeted' past, something which was also alluded to by Ossian (b. 1954), who said that he didn't 'see a male / female thing' because it was 'old-fashioned'.[70]

Although these interviewees were keen to reject binary ideas of gender, they invoked other binaries in order to do so. A binary was frequently created between 'bodies', especially genitalia, and 'people', and interviewees argued that they valued the 'person' more. For example, Alison argued: 'I'm not exclusively attracted to – bits – I'm attracted to nice people, people who are nice to me', 'I'm attracted to the whole person'.[71] The 'person' was therefore defined by their 'niceness', or personality, in opposition to their 'bits'. In other interviews, interviewees acknowledged that physical appearance played a role in their attractions, but that this was not divided by binary gender. Curtis acknowledged the role of 'general appearance' alongside

[67] Interview with Alison (pseudonym), b. 1967, 5 October 2018.
[68] Interview with Nigel, b. 1963, 12 January 2019.
[69] Interview with Nigel, b. 1963, 12 January 2019.
[70] Interview with Ossian (pseudonym), b. 1954, 13 August 2018.
[71] Interview with Alison (pseudonym), b. 1967, 5 October 2018.

personality, but also emphasised that genitals were unimportant: 'Whether they've got a penis or a vagina has not been a big issue for me. [*laughs*] […] Erm… it's more their general appearance, and their personality', 'It's not, for me, what their genitalia is like'.[72]

Only Aidan (b. 1971) explicitly rejected the binary divide between 'person' and 'body', by emphasising that: 'I saw *people*, and I felt attraction, to *people*. I didn't recognise the definitions. I obviously recognised they had different *bits*, because they were men and women in body form, and difference – for that reason, there are differences'.[73] He then attempted to undo the distinction between 'person' and 'body': 'But for me, I was attracted to the person, *and* the body. And the two didn't need to be separated'.[74]

Over time, then, bisexuals and people attracted to multiple genders changed from emphasising the importance of gender differences in their attractions and relationships ('I find men sexually, and women emotionally, more exciting'), to downplaying gender differences, often emphatically ('I am genuinely attracted to people regardless of their gender').[75] In the next section, I will expand on interviewees' binary division between 'bodies' and 'people' by exploring another way in which gender and the body were discussed in relation to attraction and relationships – in terms of androgyny.

Androgyny

Several interviewees connected their belief that gender did not affect their feelings for people to their attraction to people they perceived as androgynous. For example, Ossian followed up his argument that a 'male / female thing' was old-fashioned and binary by saying 'I like the idea of androgyny'.[76] Curtis said: 'I do like androgy – androgynous people […] I've found androgyny a – a real area of an attraction, for me', and Gwen described a specific person she had

[72] Interview with Curtis (pseudonym), b. 1958, 24 July 2018.
[73] Interview with Aidan, b. 1971, 22 June 2018.
[74] Interview with Aidan, b. 1971, 22 June 2018.
[75] Alan, quoted in Wolff, *Bisexuality*, 121; Interview with Alison (pseudonym), b. 1967, 5 October 2018.
[76] Interview with Ossian (pseudonym), b. 1954, 13 August 2018.

been attracted to: 'She was someone who… really was *totally* androgynous. You couldn't – you would not know, erm, what gender this person was, and… she or he didn't really want you to. Erm… I liked that. I *really* liked that'.[77] In the 1970s, one of Wolff's interviewees, Gordon, described being similarly attracted to an androgynous woman: 'the attraction of Carmen was that she is a really bossy butch woman – domineering yet attractive, tough-minded and very intelligent, professional yet sexually alluring'.[78] He linked this to the idea of bisexuality as a combination of heterosexual and homosexual elements: 'she turns me on by canalising all the other half of my sex drive – the half I normally spent in the homosexual mode'.[79] However, he was the exception rather than the rule in the 1970s sources, which were much more likely to identify bisexuals *themselves* as androgynous, rather than particularly attracted to androgyny.

As discussed in the Introduction, bisexuality and androgyny were historically linked.[80] Although the modern meaning of bisexuality, referring to sexual and romantic attraction, came into use around 1915, earlier meanings that linked bisexuality to what we would now describe as intersexuality or androgyny still influenced understandings of bisexuality in the 1970s and beyond. In 1977, Wolff stated that her subjects were 'conscious of the fact that their bi-gender identity and bisexual inclinations went together'.[81] The interview excerpts and autobiographies Wolff included focussed more on relationships and attraction than 'bi-gender identity', but they did discuss gender identity and gender stereotypes. Adrian wrote: 'When I am with Ingrid I feel a "total man and woman". How can a man feel like a woman too? I cannot answer that, but again, I am more aware of my male body than in past years'.[82] Others reflected on their gender presentation and identity as children – Audrey said that she 'wasn't happy about being a girl. I always thought that boys had a much better deal. Once I considered dressing myself as a boy',

[77] Interview with Curtis (pseudonym), b. 1958, 24 July 2018; Interview with Gwen (pseudonym), b. 1951, 9 October 2018.
[78] Gordon, quoted in Wolff, *Bisexuality*, 191.
[79] Gordon, quoted in Wolff, *Bisexuality*, 191.
[80] MacDowall, "Historicising Contemporary Bisexuality", 4.
[81] Wolff, *Bisexuality*, 62.
[82] Adrian, quoted in Wolff, *Bisexuality*, 145.

while both Charles and Gordon described themselves as effeminate during their youth: 'I was useless at sports, and the more manly activities of the world', 'I was a soft boy […] I had a somewhat girlish appearance and did not like rough sports'.[83] Walter stated simply that he 'dislike[d] a fixed gender role. It is false'.[84] While Wolff's bisexual subjects did not define bisexuality *as* androgyny, these frequent references to androgynous gender presentation suggest that they viewed their sexuality and androgyny as linked, or at least pertinent to one another. In the mid-1980s, articles in *Bi-Monthly* argued that androgyny could be both 'physiological' (i.e. intersexuality) or 'behavioural', and that 'the androgynous person is the "visible bisexual"' because they were potentially attractive to men and women.[85] Bisexual identity and androgynous gender presentation were therefore linked in both 1970s and 1980s sources.

One of my interviewees, Aidan, was nonbinary, and discussed gender identity and his understanding of gender at some length. At the beginning of the interview, he reflected on his childhood: 'since I was about… seven or eight, I used to dress in my mum's clothes […] looking back now, what was true was I was *nonbinary*. I was someone who never identified as male or female, yet it's really only in the last… two or three years, that I've been aware of that term'.[86] Aidan said that his gender and sexuality 'fit together for me' and were 'closely linked', and he made links between the discrimination that 'the trans and the bisexual community [both] experience'.[87] He also used 'bi nonbinary' as a single label for himself, rather than describing himself as bisexual *and* nonbinary. However, his discussion of the link between his sexuality and gender focused more on general sexual attraction 'sometimes sexual… appetite and sexual desire is a bloody nuisance' rather than any sense of the historical links between bisexuality and

[83] Audrey, quoted in Wolff, *Bisexuality,* 167; Charles, quoted in Wolff, *Bisexuality*, 172; Gordon, quoted in Wolff, *Bisexuality,* 187.
[84] Walter, quoted in Wolff, *Bisexuality*, 193.
[85] Rachel O'Connor, "Features: Why is Androgyny Like the Berlin Wall?", *Bi-Monthly*, June – July 1986, 12; Rachel O'Connor, "In Praise of Androgyny", *Bi-Monthly*, August 1984, 8.
[86] Interview with Aidan, b. 1971, 22 June 2018.
[87] Interview with Aidan, b. 1971, 22 June 2018.

androgyny.[88]

Another interviewee, Chryssy, was a trans woman, and also reflected on her gender presentation as a young person: 'they saw me developing – into quite a feminine teenager', 'this was a woman's second-hand clothes shop, and I got most of my clothes […] out of the dustbins from the back, and they were just *random* women's clothes'.[89] Unlike Aidan, she separated bisexuality from her gender identity, because she saw bisexuality as perpetuating a binary idea of gender. For this reason, she identified as pansexual rather than bisexual: 'for me bisexuality would be a claim to two genders'.[90] Again, this is quite distinct from the historical meanings of bisexuality which, as discussed in the Introduction, saw it explicitly as a bridge between male and female or masculine and feminine.

My cisgender interviewees generally did not reflect on their gender identity in much detail. Louise (b. 1966) briefly discussed her identity as a femme woman, and Ossian said that he thought he was 'actually quite androgynous'.[91] Ossian also talked about the idea of 'genderfuck' in South London GLF, exemplified by one incident in a pub:

> I had my big black suit on, and I had a lurex top on, and er – fake pearls. And I walked in and the landlady had a – a *lurex* top on and *real* pearls! [*both laugh*]. And her little boy – her little boy looks up, looks at his mum, then looks at me, and then looks back at h – thinking [*laughs*] *what's going on*! That's genderfuck [*laughs*] Yeah, that's genderfuck. That's what it was about. You know the – challenging the idea of male and female roles.[92]

However, in general these conversations were fairly brief. For most interviewees in the late 2010s, androgyny and gender nonconformity was something they found appealing in other people, rather than something they modelled in themselves.

In the 1970s, then, some people attracted to multiple genders were still affected by earlier definitions of bisexuality that linked it to androgyny, and this influenced their discussions of their

[88] Interview with Aidan, b. 1971, 22 June 2018.
[89] Interview with Chryssy, b. 1962, 12 September 2018.
[90] Interview with Chryssy, b. 1962, 12 September 2018.
[91] Interview with Ossian (pseudonym), b. 1954, 13 August 2018.
[92] Interview with Ossian (pseudonym), b. 1954, 13 August 2018.

own gender identity – they were more likely to describe themselves as androgynous or gender non-conforming, or as having been androgynous in childhood. At the same time, 1970s sources expressed a binary view of gender with respect to attraction and relationships, and sharply differentiated between their feelings based on binary gender. By the mid-1980s, these discourses had begun to shift. Androgyny was still seen primarily as something a bisexual *was*, rather than something they might be particularly attracted to, but attraction was no longer sorted into a binary of 'sexual' and 'romantic' which aligned with male and female partners. By the 2010s, interviewees were less conscious of earlier definitions of bisexuality that linked it to androgyny and intersexuality. Discussions of gender were therefore less focussed on interviewees' own gender identity, and more focussed on their attraction to androgyny in others. Professions of being attracted to androgyny were also linked to a minimisation of the role of gender differences in their attractions to and relationships with other people, influenced by earlier criticisms of bisexuality for maintaining sexist gender roles.

Relationships and Identity

I will now focus on the extent to which those attracted to multiple genders linked their identity to their experience of relationships – for example, whether identifying as lesbian necessitated the rejection of relationships with men. When I first started listening to the Hall-Carpenter interviews, before I had conducted any interviews of my own, I expected that women who identified as lesbian but had previously been in relationships with men would seek to distance themselves from these past relationships.[93] This phenomenon has been analysed by Amy

[93] I am focusing specifically on female Hall-Carpenter interviewees who had been in relationships with multiple genders here because male Hall-Carpenter interviewees had different relationship circumstances, from which it is difficult to draw conclusions. Christopher Spence, b. 1944 (interviewed by MF, 26 September 1990, The British Library: HCA Oral History Project, C456/95) identified as gay but was in a relationship with a woman at the time of the interview (rather than this being something in the past). Dave Godin, b. 1936 (interviewed by MF, 10 June 1990, The British Library: HCA Oral History Project, C456/88) identified as bisexual, and was not in a relationship at the time of the interview. David / Della McKenna, b. 1944, (interviewed by EH, 27 January 1994, The British Library: HCA Oral History Project, C456/125) identified as a queen or as homosexual. He briefly distanced himself from relationships with girls that had occurred when he was a child or young teenager, but most of his discussion of relationships was focussed on adult relationships with men.

Tooth Murphy, who interviewed lesbians between 2010 and 2013, and found that those who had previously been married to men tended to reject their former marriages as a 'rupture' in their life story.[94] Tooth Murphy argues that the efforts of her interviewees to create a 'composed' life story narrative often involved the creation of two distinct selves: the present-day lesbian, and the past 'heteronormative and conforming' self, enabling women to 'dissolve' and 'reject' their past behaviour and identity.[95]

Some Hall-Carpenter interviewees did seek to distance themselves from their past relationships. For example, Jackie (b. 1926), who married in the 1950s, stated 'If I had been *born*… and by the sense of being *born* as a lesbian, and *aware*, in the sixties and seventies, I never would have got married', while Ellen (b. 1956), who married in the early 1970s, said 'I think… all I wanted was the freedom [from a strictly religious family]. I didn't really want to get married'.[96] However, these statements focussed on the *context* of getting married: pressure in the 1950s on unmarried women, and chafing against parental and religious control in the early 1970s. There was a notable absence of criticism directed at the specific men that these women were in relationships with.

Instead, many women expressed affection for their former partners. Gilli (b. 1942) – whose relationship with her husband, it should be noted, ended due to his death rather than separation – was the most positive.[97] Remembering her husband, she said 'he was my hero', 'I was absolutely in love with him', and 'we had such a fantastic sexual relationship'.[98] But even the women who chose to end their relationships with men reflected back on them largely positively.

---

[94] Amy Tooth Murphy, "'I conformed, I got married. It seemed like a good idea at the time': Domesticity in postwar lesbian oral history", in *British Queer History: New Approaches and Perspectives*, ed. Brian Lewis (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), 174.
[95] Tooth Murphy, "I conformed", 174, 168.
[96] Jackie Forster, b. 1927, interviewed by MF, 14 June 1990, The British Library: HCA Oral History Project, C456/87; Ellen Noor b. 1956, interviewed by unknown interviewer, 1985, The British Library: HCA Oral History Project, C456/46.
[97] Gilli Salvat, b. 1942, interviewed by AD, 29 June 1986, The British Library: HCA Oral History Project, C456/40.
[98] Gilli Salvat, b. 1942, interviewed by AD, 29 June 1986, The British Library: HCA Oral History Project, C456/40.

Liz (b. 1951) remembered her relationship as characterised by 'a sense of… safety, and security […] affection, and a really strong caring'.[99] Diane (b. 1941) said simply 'I was very, very fond of him'.[100] For these women, therefore, relationships with men in the past did not negate their lesbian identity. Furthermore, as discussed in Chapter One, relationships with men in the *present* were also compatible with a lesbian identity for some: the Hall-Carpenter interviewee, Diane, and one of my interviewees, Judith (b. 1954), both identified as lesbian while being in relationships with men.[101] It was not, therefore, assumed that a certain experience of relationships would lead to a specific sexual identity: behaviour and identity were largely separate in these discussions.

For some of my other interviewees, too, their relationships did not necessarily have a bearing on their identity. This was particularly the case for those interviewees who identified as lesbian or gay for political reasons. Elsa (b. 1951), for example, also reflected positively on her previous relationship with a man – 'it was a very happy, very strong, very loving, very – deep relationship' – but stated that ultimately her lesbianism was about 'politics and the whole… *life*, basically'.[102] Previous relationships with men did not need to be negated in order to identify as lesbian, because for these interviewees identity was primarily a political issue. Judith highlighted this when she talked about the 'notion that you have your sexual behaviour, and you have your sexual identity, and then you have your political affiliation', and while her sexual behaviour 'was bisexual', her sexual identity and political affiliation were lesbian.[103] It should also be noted that this explanation of relationships and identity also did not fully align with 'political lesbianism' as discussed in Chapter One, which called for the rejection of all sex with men as akin to rape: 'A political lesbian is a woman-identified woman who does not fuck men'.[104] While these

[99] Liz Kelly, b. 1951, interviewed by MF, 16 March 1991, The British Library: HCA Oral History Project, C456/105.
[100] Diane Langford, b. 1941, interviewed by MF, 10 May 1991, The British Library: HCA Oral History Project, C456/107.
[101] Diane Langford, b. 1941, interviewed by MF, 10 May 1991, The British Library: HCA Oral History Project, C456/107; Interview with Judith (pseudonym), b. 1954, 11 October 2018.
[102] Interview with Elsa (pseudonym), b. 1951, 29 January 2019.
[103] Interview with Judith (pseudonym), b. 1954, 11 October 2018.
[104] Leeds Revolutionary Feminists, *Love Your Enemy?*, 5.

interviewees identified as lesbian for political reasons, they did not necessarily align themselves wholeheartedly with 'political lesbian' approaches, potentially *because* their personal experiences with male partners had been largely positive.

For other interviewees, their identity and relationships were more closely linked. Louise described her first few encounters with men, in her mid-thirties: 'That was when I began to kind of think, okay, well if this is going to be a thing, I'm not, you know, I don't feel comfortable calling myself a lesbian any more […] I needed to identify clearly'.[105] Once she felt that her relationships with men were 'going to be a thing', Louise felt that she could no longer identify as lesbian and had to 'identify clearly' as bisexual – which for her meant coming out as bisexual to herself, her friends, colleagues and family.

Other interviewees were more ambivalent about the connection between their identities and their experience of relationships. Curtis initially attempted to show that his identity was closely linked to his attractions and relationships. He repeatedly emphasised that his attractions as a child and a teenager were solely directed at other boys, and he identified as gay as a result: 'At school I wouldn't have – I wouldn't have any interest in women, I'd no – the thought of sleeping with a woman just didn't a – it just didn't appeal to me at all'.[106] He tried to assert a straightforward narrative of single-gender-attraction as a youth becoming multiple-gender-attraction when he went to university, and this prompting identification as bisexual:

> I started to become – see women that I was interested in, and I found sexually attractive, when I was at university […] And then over time, internally I realised that – there's no way I'm going to be either straight, or gay. I like guys and girls. And then eventually, I realised "well yeah, I'm bisexual".[107]

However, at a different point in the interview he revealed that his attraction and identity were less immediately connected: 'when I started having sex, from time to time […] with women, erm… I think I still saw myself as gay to begin with. I didn't think of the word bisexual'.[108] Although

---

[105] Interview with Louise, b. 1966, 27 July 2018.
[106] Interview with Curtis (pseudonym), b. 1958, 24 July 2018.
[107] Interview with Curtis (pseudonym), b. 1958, 24 July 2018.
[108] Interview with Curtis (pseudonym), b. 1958, 24 July 2018.

Curtis explicitly identified as bisexual by the time of our interview, it was not clear exactly when he started to do so. He stated: 'Now, as for *me*, *my* identity… I'm not sure when I started thinking "I'm bisexual", but what happened was… I joined the police force'.[109] His discussion then moved on to his 25 years of service in the police force, about which he stated both that 'there was no way – that they would have accepted me if they knew I was gay' and 'Coz, by that time, I was bisexual, definitely'.[110] The chronology, and the connections between his attractions, relationships and identity, were therefore still ambiguous. He also stated that 'I'm comfortable *now*, but it's late in my life that I've become comfortable with that identity'.[111] Again, the parameters of 'late in my life' are undefined. What is clear is that, 'to begin with' at least, Curtis identified as gay at the same time as being attracted to and in relationships with multiple genders – that is, his experience of relationships did not necessarily or immediately affect the way he identified.

Chryssy's narrative of relationships suggested their influence on her identity varied across her life – at some points her identity was directly informed by her experience of relationships, whereas at other points the connection was less clear. As a young person, before she came out as a trans woman, 'I only experienced attraction to boys, and that's how I – embedded myself'.[112] After a few years, in her late teens or early twenties, 'I suddenly found myself going out with a woman? […] Which surprised me. Coz I'd never – that had never occurred to me that that would be a thing for me'.[113] Chryssy's description of 'suddenly' and surprisingly finding herself in this relationship creates a narrative in which she had very little agency or control over her relationships. This was also echoed in her description of her marriage, which again was portrayed as unexpected and surprising: 'We ended up getting married and having children?'.[114] On the other hand, Chryssy herself expressed a belief that the 'thread, which goes through… my life' was to 'keep on searching for things?', which suggests more agency and active

[109] Interview with Curtis (pseudonym), b. 1958, 24 July 2018.
[110] Interview with Curtis (pseudonym), b. 1958, 24 July 2018.
[111] Interview with Curtis (pseudonym), b. 1958, 24 July 2018.
[112] Interview with Chryssy, b. 1962, 12 September 2018.
[113] Interview with Chryssy, b. 1962, 12 September 2018.
[114] Interview with Chryssy, b. 1962, 12 September 2018.

participation.[115]

In terms of 'searching' for her sexual identity, however, Chryssy said that she came out to a friend as bisexual when she was 15 – before she had had any relationships with women – but in the same breath stated that 'I thought of myself as gay for quite a long time'.[116] As a young person she knew about the existence of bisexuality and had an idea about its meaning – she referred to David Bowie and the 'rock-star-inspired', 'trendy' idea of bisexuality, which she understood to be 'hey man, everyone's bisexual, we can all sleep with everyone', again linking bisexuality and promiscuity.[117] However, when she 'found herself' in her first relationship with a woman, her reaction was to think 'oh, perhaps I'm just over [being gay]', and 'from that time onwards – and this goes on to the '90s, I literally didn't… *think* about sleeping with men at all. In any way, shape, or form'.[118] During her teens, twenties and thirties, she saw herself as having 'these periods of – being gay, then being straight, and being gay, then being straight'.[119] Although these periods constituted attraction to multiple genders across her lifespan, she only identified herself as bisexual *before* she had experienced any multiple-gender-attraction. By the time of our interview, she had identified as pansexual for many years, but like Curtis, the exact timing of this was not clear. Her identity, relationships and attractions were therefore neither clearly linked nor clearly demarcated.

Vera presented different interpretations of the connection between her relationships and identity at different points in the interview. Vera identified as bisexual as a young woman, then as lesbian between 1984 and 1999, then as bisexual again. When discussing her lesbian identity, she suggested that it influenced her understanding of her relationships, but at another point in the interview she explicitly rejected the idea that her identity was based on changing relationship status. Unlike other lesbian interviewees discussed above, she *had* felt the need to repudiate her

[115] Interview with Chryssy, b. 1962, 12 September 2018.
[116] Interview with Chryssy, b. 1962, 12 September 2018.
[117] Interview with Chryssy, b. 1962, 12 September 2018.
[118] Interview with Chryssy, b. 1962, 12 September 2018.
[119] Interview with Chryssy, b. 1962, 12 September 2018.

past relationships with men: 'I somehow managed to devalue it [bisexuality], I think […] it didn't make a lot of sense, but somehow I convinced myself that – although I'd – had relationship with blokes, and I'd had sex with blokes, it wasn't the *same*, and it wasn't as *good*'.[120] By 'devalu[ing]' her relationships with men as not 'as *good*', Vera had suggested, to herself and possibly others, that she had not experienced 'genuine' multiple-gender-attraction, and thus could never really have been bisexual but always a lesbian. This is a marked contrast from the lesbian interviewees discussed above, for whom multiple-gender-attraction was compatible with a lesbian identity, and suggests that Vera's identity was closely linked to relationships. On the other hand, at another point in the interview Vera argued that her identity was *not* directly informed by her relationships, which she saw as unusual:

> I've come out three times in my life, er, but - *none* of them I've actually had a partner when I came out. And I think - that's not what people do, mostly [*laughs briefly*] […] What I *see* is people changing their, description of themselves *because* of a relationship, often. […] But erm, I've never done that, I've always worked it out in my own head, and my own feelings, first […] I've never actually changed my description when I've been involved with somebody.[121]

Vera acknowledged the patterns in the Hall-Carpenter interviews by describing a 'looser' definition of lesbianism that existed in the 1970s:

> I think that in those days [the end of the 1970s], definitions were a bit looser, and it – they weren't quite so – you know, the dividing lines weren't quite so definite […] a lot of people would've d – defined lesbian as having a *preference* for women, rather than being completely exclusive, with women. So somebody that […] today we might call bi, who was more strongly interested in women, would've been – accepted as a lesbian.[122]

By the time Vera herself came to identify as lesbian, however, in the mid-1980s, she did not find the 'looser' definition of lesbianism to be as influential, and thus felt the need to disavow her earlier relationships with men.

The discussions of identity, relationships and attraction in the Hall-Carpenter interviews and my own, therefore, seems to suggest that a shift took place in terms of the connection between

---

[120] Interview with Vera (pseudonym), b. 1960, 26 October 2018.
[121] Interview with Vera (pseudonym), b. 1960, 26 October 2018.
[122] Interview with Vera (pseudonym), b. 1960, 26 October 2018.

identity and relationships during the 1980s and 1990s – one that affected Vera in 1984, but had not yet affected some of the Hall-Carpenter interviewees interviewed around 1990. This was not a dramatic change, but by the time Tooth Murphy conducted her interviews in the early 2010s there seems to have been a move towards interviewees more closely linking their identity to their experience of relationships – a sense that lesbianism required relationships exclusively with women, and that entering into a relationship with a man necessarily signalled the end of a lesbian identity.

The increasingly close association between identity and relationships could be seen as a pushback against the lesbian feminist effort to assert a political, desexualised identity as discussed in Chapters One and Two. 'Political' identities that were 'chosen' were thus juxtaposed to more 'authentic' essentialist identities which were inextricable from behaviour. For example, Alison recalled a conversation with political lesbians in the 1980s:

> You're not actually having sex with women because you're not *actually* attracted to women? How does that even compute? […] I am genuinely attracted to people regardless of their gender. How do you think that your choice, which is political lesbianism, is any more valid than my bisexuality?[123]

Defending bisexuality against its delegitimisation by political lesbians, Alison established a different binary, between 'chosen' identities and identities that were 'genuine' or 'authentic'.

The juxtaposition of 'chosen' and 'genuine' was of course not new, and had in fact been used against 'perverts' attracted to multiple genders – who 'chose' their sexual partners, unlike 'inverts' who had no choice – by the 1950s homophile movement. Its use by bisexuals in the 2010s could be seen as a reversal of earlier homophile discourses. However, the homophile discourse was centred on sexual *behaviour* – men who were attracted to multiple genders were seen as 'perverts' because they could choose whether to have sex with men or women. The move by some of my interviewees to legitimise their bisexual identity as 'genuine' because it was based on their experience of relationships, unlike identities that were 'chosen', centred *identities*. Nevertheless,

[123] Interview with Alison (pseudonym), b. 1967, 5 October 2018.

this shift represents another binary that was invoked by some interviewees in the 2010s. As with their discussions of gender that rejected binary gender roles in favour of a new binary of 'person' or 'body', interviewees' discussions of relationships and identity in the 2010s often rejected the binary of 'sexual' or 'political', creating a different binary of 'chosen' or 'authentic' in the process.

Language

As discussed above, Gilli, Liz, Diane and other lesbian Hall-Carpenter interviewees expressed positive feelings towards their male former partners, but they used a range of different registers to do so.[124] They rarely referred explicitly to attraction, instead describing 'love', 'fondness', 'affection' and 'passion'. In her exploration of relationships between women in the Victorian period, Sharon Marcus studies examples where women used the language of 'love' interchangeably with terms such as 'fond of' or 'like', as well as the language of physical attraction, when discussing their feelings for other women.[125] However, Marcus argues that 'a larger context shows [these women] were friends, not lovers'.[126] 'Lovers', or women in 'female marriages', could be identified by suggestions that women felt unusual or 'different from the general run of women', the sharing of property, and 'paralepsis' – talking about something by stating that you will not discuss it.[127] In order to try to understand the feelings that lesbian Hall-Carpenter interviewees expressed for their male former partners, I therefore need to investigate the 'larger context' of these discussions, and the ways in which these women also described their feelings towards their female partners. I will also discuss the language used by my interviewees in the late 2010s, and how this differed from earlier sources.

In some ways, these comparisons were quite difficult to access. Unlike in the 1970s sources where people explicitly described how their feelings differed towards men and women,

---

[124] As in the previous section, I am focusing specifically on female Hall-Carpenter interviewees who had been in relationships with multiple genders here, because male Hall-Carpenter interviewees had different relationship circumstances.
[125] Marcus, *Between Women*, 50-54.
[126] Marcus, *Between Women*, 56.
[127] Marcus, *Between Women*, 49-54.

it was rare for the Hall-Carpenter interviewees themselves to make explicit comparisons. Also, in many cases they were in relationships with women at the time of the interview: they may therefore have used quite different language to describe a current partner and a previous partner, regardless of gender. However, I have identified some trends in the language used to discuss relationships and feelings during those relationships.

Liz described her relationship with her former husband in terms of 'safety', 'security', 'affection', and 'caring'.[128] She described their early relationship as 'incredibly tentative', and 'based on friendship, more than it was based on passion'.[129] Her relationship with a woman, however, was described very differently as 'the most passionate relationship in my life'.[130] Although she did not explicitly discuss her feelings in a binary of 'emotional' and 'sexual', it could still be argued that her discussion of relationships still differentiated between genders along 'emotional' and 'sexual' lines, similarly to the 1970s sources discussed previously. However, Liz reversed that dominant trend by describing an emotional connection to a man and a more sexual, 'passionate' connection to a woman.

Diane, who identified as a lesbian during her marriage to a man, said that she was 'very very fond of' her husband, and also that almost immediately after the birth of their daughter they stopped having sex.[131] The use of 'fond' could suggest a more emotional than sexual connection – however, she described an earlier relationship with a different man as being 'very sexual', so her feelings towards men cannot be straightforwardly categorised. Her feelings towards women are difficult to establish – at the time she was being interviewed, she had only had one relationship with a woman. That was described simply as a 'total disaster', so cannot be easily conceptualised

[128] Liz Kelly, b. 1951, interviewed by MF, 16 March 1991, The British Library: HCA Oral History Project, C456/105.
[129] Liz Kelly, b. 1951, interviewed by MF, 16 March 1991, The British Library: HCA Oral History Project, C456/105.
[130] Liz Kelly, b. 1951, interviewed by MF, 16 March 1991, The British Library: HCA Oral History Project, C456/105.
[131] Diane Langford, b. 1941, interviewed by MF, 10 May 1991, The British Library: HCA Oral History Project, C456/107.

in terms of a binary between 'emotional' and 'sexual' feelings.

A theme in many Hall-Carpenter women's discussions of their relationships with men was of being 'educated' or 'developed' by their male partners. Gilli talked about her husband introducing her to 'a whole world, that I didn't know about', Diane said that she 'respected' her husband and 'learnt a lot from him', and Helen (b. 1944) talked about her partner giving her books to read, and stated that 'it was a relationship that opened me up very much, I think, in ways that I hadn't really explored before'.[132] The theme of 'experienced' male partner and 'naïve' woman seems to invoke distinctly gendered power dynamics, perhaps also reinforced by the fact that in many cases the male partner was several years older. However, only one woman explicitly highlighted this: Gillian (b. 1952) said that in retrospect she thought it 'wasn't good for' her to be 'looked after'.[133] One of my interviewees in 2018, Judith, seemed to recognise that this theme could be applied to her own narrative of her relationship with the 'most important man in my life', and how he '*hugely*, erm… *encouraged* me', but she explicitly rejected it: 'it definitely isn't that he introduced me to new ideas'.[134] However, this theme did not solely occur in relation to powerful or experienced male partners. Gilli also talked about how she learned about politics and sexuality from one of her female partners: 'She was the one that taught me about being a lesbian […] She was the one, that taught me about… how to make love, right? What political stance to take… sort my politics out'.[135]

Of the Hall-Carpenter interviewees, Gilli described the most similar feelings towards men and women. In addition to the theme of being 'taught' by her partners, she also described herself as having been 'head over heels in love with' her husband, and later being 'absolutely mad about'

---

[132] Gilli Salvat, b. 1942, interviewed by AD, 29 June 1986, The British Library: HCA Oral History Project, C456/40; Diane Langford, b. 1941, interviewed by MF, 10 May 1991, The British Library: HCA Oral History Project, C456/107; Helen Lowe, b. 1944, interviewed by MF, 18 March 1991, The British Library: HCA Oral History Project, C456/94.
[133] Gillian Butler, b. 1952, interviewed by MF, 9 May 1991, The British Library: HCA Oral History Project, C456/106.
[134] Interview with Judith (pseudonym), b. 1954, 11 October 2018.
[135] Gilli Salvat, b. 1942, interviewed by AD, 29 June 1986, The British Library: HCA Oral History Project, C456/40.

a female partner.[136] Her sexual relationship with her husband was described as having been 'fantastic', and although she did not make similar judgments about her sex life with women, she did state that when she was with her husband she felt 'turned on' in a way that had previously occurred once – during her teenage relationship with another girl. This suggests that her feelings towards women could also be ones of sexual attraction and passion.

Unlike the Hall-Carpenter interviewees, who rarely explicitly discussed attraction, my interviewees repeatedly referred to 'attraction' and being 'attracted', and were less likely to use terms such as 'fond'. Furthermore, not only did they refer to 'attraction' more frequently, their descriptions of attraction were also very closely linked to their insistence that their feelings were not differentiated by gender. Aidan said that he 'genuinely feel[s] attraction to all sorts of people', Louise said 'sexual attraction just feels like sexual attraction', Curtis referred to '*sexual* attraction' and '*romantic* attraction' in order to clarify that he didn't experience a difference between genders, and Alison said that her 'attraction wasn't limited by gender'.[137]

Interviewees in the late 2010s also used the language of 'interest': 'I started getting interested in – in girls […] the first awakening for me that I had interest in men', 'I knew I was interested in *girls* […] but, I was also, erm, interested in boys', 'my interest lay there'.[138] The word 'interest' was often used to describe feelings in the interviewee's youth, particularly the first realisation of these feelings. This may be because terms such as 'attraction' or 'fancied', which was also sometimes used, connote more sexual feelings that a child or young teenager may not have recognised, or that an adult interviewee might not want to apply to their childhood self.

My interviewees between 2018 and 2020 were therefore more likely to explicitly discuss

---

[136] Gilli Salvat, b. 1942, interviewed by AD, 29 June 1986, The British Library: HCA Oral History Project, C456/40.
[137] Interview with Aidan, b. 1971, 22 June 2018; Interview with Louise, b. 1966, 27 July 2018; Interview with Curtis (pseudonym), b. 1958, 24 July 2018; Interview with Alison (pseudonym), b. 1967, 5 October 2018.
[138] Interview with Neil (pseudonym), b. 1958, 26 September 2018; Interview with Gwen (pseudonym), b. 1951, 9 October 2018; Interview with Ossian (pseudonym), b. 1954, 13 August 2018.

'attraction' in a general sense, rather than focussed on specific individuals. The Hall-Carpenter interviewees tended to focus more on a range of different types of feelings that *could* be read as 'attraction': sexual satisfaction, love, admiration and fondness. The feelings of the Hall-Carpenter interviewees also tended to be expressed in the context of specific relationships, rather than in a more generalised, 'potential' sense.

Change Over Time

In Chapter Three, I argued that bisexuals and those attracted to multiple genders told quite different 'coming out stories' from the mainstream 'gay and lesbian' narrative. In contrast, the key difference in the stories told in different sources about relationships and attraction was not between 'bisexual' and 'gay' narratives, but rather between earlier and later narratives – a change over time.

The most significant differences between present-day interviews and sources from the 1970s and 1980s were in relation to gender. The discussions of gender and attraction in 1970s sources, such as MacInnes's argument about 'emotional-sexual' relationships with women and 'promiscuous-sexual' relationships with men, reveal the influence of gender role stereotypes that positioned women as more 'emotional' and sensitive, and men as more highly-sexed and less capable of emotion. As I have discussed in Chapters One and Two, bisexuals and people attracted to multiple genders were criticised for being politically regressive in the 1970s and 1980s. A key part of this was criticising men who were attracted to multiple genders for being misogynistic, and their perceived adherence to old-fashioned gender roles could be part of this. Efforts to de-emphasise the role of gender difference in attraction during the 2010s could therefore be seen as a response to earlier critiques of bisexuality and attraction to multiple genders for being sexist.

For example, Roger Baker's review of *Loving Them Both* referred to the 'MacInnes machismo' and said he was 'wholly coloured by the sexist principles of the most rampant male

chauvinism'.[139] Men in 'mixed marriages', such as Elers, who discussed his 'affection' but not 'sexual attraction' for his wife, were often portrayed as taking advantage of their wives. The anonymous 'Mrs Midlands' wrote in *Gay News* that it was always assumed that the heterosexual wife would be the one to 'do the adjusting and make the allowances'.[140] 'Jane Smith' also wrote in *Gay News* about how her gay husband took her for granted as someone who will 'have sex with him […] contribute all my salary to the family budget […] who can be happy to do all this and leave him able to "be himself". It is just asking too much', as well as the difficulties of being a 'straight married woman' – 'it means putting another person's interest before one's own […] it means that when we get home, it is the wife who prepares the evening meal'.[141] Implicitly, her husband was portrayed as taking advantage of these traditional gender roles. The 'emotional' attraction that some men in mixed marriages described feeling for their wives could therefore be seen as a way of desexualising them, and demanding traditional gender roles. It is therefore unsurprising that, in the wake of these critiques, and given the influence of the anti-sexist men's movement on the bisexual groups formed in the 1980s, bisexuals and people attracted to multiple genders would seek to disavow their previous emphasis on gender differences as 'old-fashioned'.[142]

My interviewees' comments about gender and androgyny should also be viewed in light of criticisms of bisexuality since the 1990s for perpetuating the gender binary, because the prefix 'bi' suggests 'two'. This argument is used today to argue that bisexuality is transphobic and, as Shiri Eisner argues, to again situate bisexuality 'as an oppressive identity that promotes hegemonic ideals'.[143] Eisner attributes this idea to the work of Lee Edelman and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick – for example Edelman wrote in 1994 that the 'hetero/homo binarism' was 'more effectively reinforced, than disrupted by the "third term" of bisexuality'.[144] This idea follows on from earlier criticisms of bisexuals in the 1970s and 1980s for maintaining binary gender norms

[139] Baker, "Stud Against the Wall", 13.
[140] Mrs Midlands, "Mixed Marriages", *Gay News*, June 1977, 18.
[141] Smith, "A Good Front", 18.
[142] Interview with Ossian (pseudonym), b. 1954, 13 August 2018.
[143] Eisner, *Bi*, 54.
[144] Lee Edelman, quoted in Eisner, *Bi*, 54.

(of men as sexual and women as emotional). Since the 1990s, rather than simply maintaining 'norms' in their discussions of relationships and attraction, bisexuals were accused of maintaining the *concept* of binary gender itself by the nature of their identity label.

As mentioned above, one interviewee, Chryssy, agreed with this criticism, and identified as pansexual as a result.[145] However, other interviewees rejected it very strongly, such as Alison: 'Bi is the historical word, and I'm not suddenly going to abandon it because other people have the wrong idea of what it actually means now […] Bisexual doesn't mean two genders'.[146] Some interviewees' discussions of being attracted to androgyny could also be seen as an effort to highlight that their attractions were not along binary gender lines, such as Gwen's argument that 'you would not know what gender this person was […] I liked that'.[147]

As discussed in Chapter Two, there were some initial efforts in the late 1970s to reject criticisms of bisexuality as politically regressive and sexist. These efforts argued that bisexuality was actually *more* radical, because its promiscuity threatened 'conservative people' and was non-discriminatory. However, during and after the 1980s this idea became less popular. In my interviews, the 'non-discrimination of a high order!' optimistically linked to bisexuality seems to be better represented by my interviewees' insistence that their attraction did not 'discriminate' according to gender.[148] Unlike in the 1970s, where the 'capacity to love people' was linked to 'joyfully and lovingly hav[ing] sex with anyone else', my interviewees were at pains to separate their potential to be *attracted* to people of multiple genders from their desire to have *relationships* with multiple people: 'I genuinely feel attraction to all sorts of people. It's not, it's not, a – a pathological problem, you know it's not [that] I can't walk along the street without getting to the end of the street coz I'm attracted to everyone'.[149] In the late 2010s, the emphasis on promiscuity had thus been reduced and instead there was more focus on attraction outside the gender binary.

---

[145] Interview with Chryssy, b. 1962, 12 September 2018.
[146] Interview with Alison (pseudonym), b. 1967, 5 October 2018.
[147] Interview with Gwen (pseudonym), b. 1951, 9 October 2018.
[148] Richard, "Bisexuality at Malvern", 4.
[149] Spicer, "Minimising", 14; Interview with Aidan, b. 1971, 22 June 2018.

I would argue, therefore, that the change in attitudes towards gender difference and androgyny between the 1970s sources and my interviews conducted in 2018 – 2020 were primarily a result of changing politics of gender, attraction and sexual identity in that time.

To say that my interviewees were influenced by earlier criticisms of bisexuality for maintaining sexist gender roles does not mean that they were deliberately misrepresenting the role of gender in their experiences of relationships and attraction, compared to more 'authentic' presentations in the 1970s that had not yet been influenced by feminist and liberationist critiques. Rather, I am arguing that the discussions of attraction and relationships in 1970s and 1980s sources were affected by their historical context, including mid-century ideas about different genders' approach to sex, and my interviewees were affected by the different historical context of the late 2010s, which included criticisms of bisexuality as promiscuous, sexist and binarist. Changing narratives of relationships and attraction thus illustrate broader societal changes that have occurred since the 1970s, and complicate the image of a straightforward 'decline' in long-term monogamy.[150]

Conclusion

Numerous distinctions can be drawn between narratives about relationships and attraction in the 1970s, and the narratives of my interviewees in the late 2010s. The 1980s, especially from the middle of the decade, were a transitional period, where bisexuals and those attracted to multiple genders were beginning to move away from approaches in the 1970s – the associations between bisexuality and androgyny, and efforts to reinterpret bisexual non-monogamy as evidence of radicalism, for example – but had not yet fully rejected them.

Attention to multiple-gender-attraction therefore shows that there were significant changes in attitudes to relationships and attraction between the 1970s and the present day. Some of these, such as a greater focus on 'attraction' and the refusal of gender differentiation in favour

[150] Langhamer, *The English in Love*, 210.

of androgyny, support the argument that earlier ideals of mutuality in relationships had been rejected.[151] Others, such as a more hesitant approach to non-monogamy and increasingly close associations between relationships and identity, challenge the historiographical consensus by suggesting a strengthening of monogamous romantic relationships. Overall, the simple fact that narratives about relationships changed significantly between the 1970s and the present counters the historiographical assumption that the period after 1970 was characterised by a straightforward decline in long-term relationships and marriages after a peak in the mid-century.[152]

Those attracted to multiple genders in the 1970s and 1980s were more likely to associate bisexuality and non-monogamy, and some saw the potential for a radical politics of bisexual promiscuity in this association. By the 2010s, however, interviewees sought to reject the idea that bisexuality was non-monogamous because they saw this as potentially stigmatising. In the 1970s, those attracted to multiple genders were more likely to differentiate their feelings along binary gender lines, generally expressing more 'emotional' attraction to women and more 'sexual' attraction to men, while seeing themselves as androgynous. This was beginning to change in the 1980s, and by the 2010s discussions of gender were diametrically opposed to 1970s sources: interviewees downplayed gender differences in terms of attraction, and were more likely to describe themselves as *attracted* to androgyny than androgynous themselves. In the 1970s and 1980s, interviewees were less likely to base their identity on their experience of relationships: for example, they tended not to see a conflict between multiple-gender-attraction and a lesbian identity, whereas my interviewees, especially younger interviewees who had not been part of earlier discussions around political lesbianism, were more likely to see their identity as 'authentic' because it was based on their attraction and relationships rather than a political

---

[151] Collins, *Modern Love*, 217, argues that 'the sexes grew more similar' in the 1990s, which is supported by my interviewees' rejection of gender differences.
[152] Langhamer, *The English in Love*, 210: '[in 1972] love and marriage were about to change once again, heralding the rapid decomposition of short-lived mid-century ideals […] In the years that followed the marriage rate plummeted. By 2009 it had fallen to the lowest level since calculations began'.

choice. Finally, in my interviews between 2018 and 2020 interviewees tended to focus on 'attraction' in a more generalised sense, whereas earlier sources focus more on their experience of relationships.

There are several different reasons for these changes in interviewees' discussion of relationships and attraction. The different foci on 'attraction' and 'relationships' could be attributed simply to different styles of interviewing, as discussed at the beginning of this chapter, although as argued previously I do not think the interview contexts are the only or most significant explanation. Changing approaches to identity and relationships suggest some of the pushback against 'political lesbianism' and other 'political' identities after the 1980s. Bisexuals and those attracted to multiple genders were part of this, as discussed in Chapter Two, although it was not limited to them. For many of my interviewees, the identity that was most 'authentic' was one that had a close – and, perhaps, essentialist – relation to attraction and behaviour. Changing attitudes to non-monogamy suggest that criticisms of bisexuality for being 'promiscuous' had had an effect, particularly from the 1980s onwards. The most significant change, however, was the understanding of gender binaries and a rejection of gender stereotyping. This led interviewees in the late 2010s to downplay the role of gender in attraction, and emphasise instead their attraction to androgyny and gender nonconformity.

In discussions of attraction and relationships, then, we see some of the effects of the discourses on bisexuality and multiple-gender-attraction discussed in Chapters One and Two. The politics of bisexuality, and of its exclusion, had an impact not just on community formation but also on how individuals experienced and reflected on some of their most intimate, interpersonal relations.

Chapter Five

Popular Memory

'It is precisely because "the past" has this living active existence in the present that it matters so much politically', wrote the Popular Memory Group of Birmingham's Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies.[1] Oral history was particularly important for the study of popular memory, they argued, because it was often where historical and political tensions were most apparent: 'the whole way in which popular memories are constructed and reconstructed as part of a contemporary consciousness'.[2] In this chapter, I consider the ways in which interviewees narrated their memories of the 1970s and 1980s, and how far this aligned with popular memories of the period. I argue that popular memories of these decades are currently in flux, allowing interviewees to select from a variety of different narratives of the period – nostalgic narratives of liberation; critiques of regression and state repression; sadness or frustration at divisions within the 'LGBTQ community' – generally without evincing significant discomposure. These memories were often at odds with the dominant popular narrative of decline and crisis in the 1970s followed by the 'neoliberal' 1980s, but interviewees did not assert a specifically 'bisexual' or 'multiple-gender attracted' narrative of the past. Instead, they aligned themselves with broader 'LGBT' histories popularised by recent events such as the fiftieth and thirtieth anniversaries of the Sexual Offences Act and Section 28, respectively. These histories were a form of popular memory, albeit less generally 'popular' than narratives of 1970s crisis and 1980s neoliberalism.

The marking of recent key 'anniversaries' also links to the second key argument of this chapter, that the 'present moment' when my interviews were conducted (2018 – 2020) was essential to how interviewees 'constructed and reconstructed' memories of the past. Interviewees often drew links between the present moment and their memories of the 1970s and 1980s. This was arguably facilitated by present-day discourses about 'returning to' or 'replaying'

[1] Popular Memory Group, *Popular Memory?*, 8.
[2] Popular Memory Group, *Popular Memory?*, 17.

the past, primarily in relation to a parliamentary politics. In relation to sexuality, May 2018 was the thirtieth anniversary of the passage of Section 28 of the Local Government Act, which was marked by anniversary events around the country – indeed, I met one interviewee, Lisa (b. 1954), at one such event.[3] Other present-day events that interviewees referred to were the consultation about reforming the Gender Recognition Act, which took place initially between July and October 2018 and led to increased media hostility towards trans people; protests in 2019 about LGBTQ-inclusive sex education in primary schools; and environmental activism by Extinction Rebellion and other groups in mid-2019. Interviewees often drew comparisons between these and the events and groups of the 1970s and 1980s, echoing contemporary analyses in the media about, for example, 'reviving the phantom of Section 28'.[4] The present moment was a constant presence in the interviews.

The Popular Memory Group's concept of popular memory focussed on a binary assessment of power relations. They argued that there were 'two main ways in which a sense of the past is produced' – firstly, 'dominant memory', public institutional representations of the past, and secondly individual 'private memory' that was 'not offered the occasion to speak'.[5] Although they argued that the two informed each other, the dichotomy between 'dominant' and 'silenced' memories suggested that the production of memory was primarily 'top-down', and could be seen as romanticising 'hidden' histories.[6] Anna Green sees the Popular Memory Group as exemplary of a shift in focus to the 'wider social and cultural context in which remembering takes place', which she argues often amounts to 'reject[ing] the significance of individual memory altogether' and denying individual agency.[7] For example, Penny Summerfield's analysis of popular memories of

[3] Interview with Lisa, b. 1954, 4 April 2019.
[4] Owen Jones, "Pride isn't a party, it's a time for queer people to fight again for their rights", *The Guardian*, 12 June 2019, https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/jun/12/lgbtq-rights-danger-pride-fight-back-homophobic-attacks.
[5] Popular Memory Group, *Popular Memory?*, 3-6.
[6] Popular Memory Group, *Popular Memory?*, 6-7; Alistair Thompson, Michael Frisch and Paula Hamilton, "The Memory and History Debates: Some International Perspectives", *Oral History* 22, no. 2 (1994): 34.
[7] Anna Green, "Individual Remembering and 'Collective Memory': Theoretical Presuppositions and Contemporary Debates", *Oral History* 32, no. 2 (2004): 35-37.

the Second World War argues that interviewees struggled with 'discomposure' when their memories did not align with popular narratives.[8] However, Green argues that this focus on popular memories, or 'pre-existing cultural frameworks', does not leave room for the 'self-reflective individual'.[9] Although some of Green's criticisms of popular memory theorists oversimplify their arguments, I agree with her point that historians should pay attention not just to the fact that 'individuals draw upon contemporary cultural discourses to make sense of their lives', but also '*which* ones, and *why*'.[10] Helena Mills has recently done this in her analysis of how female oral history interviewees could critique the 'popular memory' of the 'swinging 60s' where it did not fit with their own experiences, but their understanding and responses were still affected by the popular narrative.[11] Like these more recent histories, in this chapter I argue against the idea of a singular 'popular memory'. My interviewees generally rejected the widely accepted mainstream narrative of political and economic decline and crisis, focussing instead on self-consciously 'LGBT' narratives of the past that could still be seen as 'popular', but to a lesser extent.

Joe Moran critiques 'narrative-driven decadology' that presents decades as 'unified entit[ies] that each have a specific character'.[12] In relation to the 1970s, he argues that popular memories often construct Britain at the time as a 'coherent, homogeneous entity'.[13] This popular narrative generally presents the 1970s as an era of political and economic crisis.[14] In part, this was due to contemporary assessments, such as Hughie Green's reactionary presentation of Britain 'old and worn, on the brink of ruin', but it has also been influenced by subsequent political priorities, seeking to portray the 1970s as a negative period where the problems of social democracy were made evident before the 'triumph' of neoliberalism.[15] In turn, popular memories

---

[8] Summerfield, "Culture and Composure", 69; Summerfield, *Women's Wartime Lives,* 252.
[9] Green, "Individual Remembering", 39.
[10] Green, "Individual Remembering", 42.
[11] Mills, "Using the personal", 463-483.
[12] Moran, "Stand Up and Be Counted", 194.
[13] Moran, "Stand Up and Be Counted", 194.
[14] Lawrence Black and Hugh Pemberton, "Introduction: The Benighted Decade", in *Reassessing 1970s Britain,* ed. Lawrence Black, Hugh Pemberton and Pat Thane (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), 3.
[15] Moran, "Stand Up and Be Counted", 173.

of the 1980s have been dominated by the role of Thatcher and Thatcherism.[16] As Matthew Hilton, Chris Moores and Florence Sutcliffe-Braithwaite argue in relation to academic historiography and more popular accounts of the 1980s, 'Thatcher is too often positioned as the "guiding force" of the decade, and "Thatcherism" is too often taken as the central analytical category'.[17]

My interviewees' narratives also tended towards 'decadology', in that they differentiated between 'the 1970s' and 'the 1980s', often generalising about the distinctive nature of these decades. However, they tended not to focus on the political, 'crisis'-based narrative of the 1970s, instead focussing more on nostalgic recollections of popular culture at the time. Although as I have said interviewees' overall narratives of the past were in line with broader 'LGBT' narratives, rather than specific to bisexuality and multiple-gender-attraction, in their discussions of popular culture they did tend to focus more on aspects of fashion and music that pertained specifically to multiple-gender-attraction. David Bowie and punk music were the two most frequently-discussed topics: Bowie famously 'came out' as bisexual in 1972 (although he retracted this in 1983), and the androgyny of punk has been linked to an 'ambiguous', 'generally bi-sexual' sexuality.[18] In this chapter I also consider the relationship between popular culture and popular memory, and how the two intersected in interviews. Often, particularly in relation to the 1970s, interviewees' discussions of changing trends in popular culture were a way for them to explain wider societal changes.

While interviewees' memories of the 1970s tended to focus more on popular culture, and less on the dominant popular memory of political crisis, their memories of the 1980s did focus more on the politics of the period. Additionally, while memories of the 1970s were often nostalgic, interviewees were more negative about the 1980s. Again, this could be due to their efforts to

---

[16] Matthew Hilton, Chris Moores and Florence Sutcliffe-Braithwaite, "New Times Revisited: Britain in the 1980s", *Contemporary British History* 31, no. 2 (2017): 147.
[17] Hilton et al, "New Times Revisited", 147.
[18] Patrick Glen, "'Oh You Pretty Thing!': How David Bowie 'Unlocked Everybody's Inner Queen' in spite of the music press", *Contemporary British History* 31, no. 3 (2017): 407-429; Pete Shelley, quoted in Robinson, *Gay Men and the Left*, 106.

focus on topics that were 'relevant' to sexuality – parliamentary politics were seen to have a more concrete, negative impact on sexual minorities during the 1980s, through Section 28 and government responses to AIDS. It may also relate to interviewees' own politics. Hilton *et al* argue that 'some left-wing activists […] deploy a rather ambiguously sketched concept of "neoliberalism" as a catch-all analytical framework for the present'.[19] Although interviewees were usually not left-wing *activists*, as discussed in Chapter Two their politics were generally left-wing. The 'analytical framework' of neoliberalism was evident in Chryssy's (b. 1962) comments about the later 1980s: 'neoliberalism starts to assert itself […] the economic conditions [of the time] determine to a large extent the cultural conditions'.[20] She was self-conscious about the problems of decadology – 'this is totalising and generalising and […] I'm sure it's disprovable' – but she added that 'I feel there's some truth for me in it'.[21]

Interviewees were conscious that they were being interviewed for a project on bisexuality and attraction to multiple genders in 1970s and 1980s Britain. In her work on queer oral history, Nan Alamilla Boyd noted that her interviewees understood that the oral histories would be archived at the Gay and Lesbian Historical Society in San Francisco, and therefore 'understood that their histories were valuable as a "gay and lesbian" product'.[22] She concludes that interviewees therefore told her what they believed she wanted to hear, justifying their 'historical value through a prideful claim to gay or lesbian identity'.[23] My interviewees were also influenced by their knowledge that the project was focussed on bisexuality and multiple-gender-attraction. Although in some cases they moved beyond dominant narratives – particularly in relation to 'coming out', as discussed in Chapter Three – in terms of popular memories of the 1970s and 1980s their narratives were often focussed on sexuality, and issues that they thought would be of particular relevance for a history of sexuality. In relation to the 1970s, this often involved

[19] Hilton et al, "New Times Revisited", 149.
[20] Interview with Chryssy, b. 1962, 12 September 2018.
[21] Interview with Chryssy, b. 1962, 12 September 2018.
[22] Boyd, "Who is the subject?", 188.
[23] Boyd, "Who is the subject?", 188.

sexuality and particularly bisexuality in popular culture – such as David Bowie and punk – or attitudes to bisexuality or homosexuality that they witnessed among family and friends. When discussing the 1980s, memories generally focussed on Section 28, the AIDS crisis and lesbian feminism. Gwen (b. 1951) directly asked 'are we going to sort of, just sort of – select memories about sexuality', and when I said that I was interested in her life more generally, she continued: 'of course when I was at secondary school, that's when one's sexual identity is forming […] so I mean it's pretty relevant really'.[24] When asked about her childhood and family background, Vera (b. 1960) began by discussing her parents' attitude to sexuality – 'they were very supportive of friends they had who were gay or bi or whatever' – and then, unprompted, added 'in terms of bisexuality, the first time I think I really came across something on bisexuality was […] The Little Red Schoolbook'.[25] Interviewees' engagement with popular memories was therefore affected by their interpretation of the interview's purpose.

In Chapter Three, I argued that 'bisexual coming out stories' differed from mainstream gay and lesbian narratives. In Chapter Four, I argued that different narratives about relationships and attraction were more attributable to broader changes in discussions of gender, identity and emotions, rather than differences between those who were attracted to multiple genders and those who were not. In this chapter, I argue that interviewees generally aligned themselves with broader 'LGBT' narratives when remembering the past, which differed from more dominant popular memories but were themselves a form of popular community narrative about the past.

Popular Culture in the 1970s and 1980s

The term 'popular culture' was first used in the nineteenth century, in juxtaposition to 'high' or 'elite' culture.[26] Indeed, it is often easier to define what does *not* count as 'popular culture'

[24] Interview with Gwen (pseudonym), b. 1951, 9 October 2018.
[25] Interview with Vera (pseudonym), b. 1960, 26 October 2018.
[26] Imre Szeman and Susie O'Brien, *Popular Culture: A User's Guide, International Edition*, 4th ed. (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2017), 14.

than it is to define what the term encompasses.[27] One definition of the term likens it to 'mass culture'; that is, the entertainment produced by commercial media that 'have the economic and technological capacity' to reach large, diverse, and geographically-dispersed audiences, such as television, film and music.[28] However, when I asked my interviewees about their memories of popular culture, they responded with reference to a wide range of types of cultural consumption. In general they focussed on music and films, but many also discussed more traditionally-conceived 'high' culture such as classic texts on sexuality ('You know, I think Kinsey's a great author', 'so many of the – best books came out of America, at the time […] the best available rev-overview of research on sex differences') and feminist art ('I went to see, erm, Judy Chicago's, er, Dinner Party, which was – extraordinary, yeah').[29] These examples have implications for the class dynamic at play in interviews, which I will discuss in further detail below. At this point, I will simply emphasise that I am using the term 'popular culture' in this chapter because it was the term I used in interviews, and because it parallels the use of 'popular memory', not because I want to focus on a narrow range of cultural products.

Although I took care to ask generally about 'anything that was particularly influential to you', rather than specifically focussing on sexuality, interviewees' discussions of popular culture often focussed on the extent to which their sexuality was represented in cultural products. For example, Ian (b. 1962) commented that: 'In terms of […] bisexual *men*, your role in drama is to *die*, or go back to your wife'.[30] David Bowie was frequently brought up in this context as an example of positive real-life bisexual representation, after he 'came out' as bisexual in *Melody Maker* in 1972. The way interviewees spoke about popular culture aligned with the discussion in Chapter One of named 'bisexual visibility' as a cultural goal in and of itself, and meant that more subtle references to or suggestions of multiple-gender-attraction were ignored, or actively

[27] Szeman and O'Brien, *Popular Culture*, 23.
[28] Szeman and O'Brien, *Popular Culture*, 23.
[29] Interview with Curtis (pseudonym), b. 1958, 24 July 2018; Interview with Judith (pseudonym), b. 1954, 11 October 2018; Interview with Elsa (pseudonym), b. 1951, 29 January 2019.
[30] Interview with Ian (b. 1962), 7 May 2019.

dismissed as cases where individuals were not 'brave' enough to use the word 'bisexual'.[31] However, there were some instances where interviewees discussed how multiple-gender-attraction might also be present in popular culture. The ambiguous 'punk sexuality' was an example of this, as were some of the books and films often discussed in the context of lesbianism, as I will discuss below.

David Bowie

'I think it's important to mention Bowie. David Bowie. Because my first inkling […] the only… *non*-straight male person who was in the public arena who – was David Bowie, who *said* – I'm bisexual. That was the first time I'd ever heard that word'.[32]

This was how Curtis (b. 1958) remembered his first encounter with the term 'bisexual'. He was one of six interviewees who mentioned David Bowie – either in terms of the 1972 *Melody Maker* interview, or the 'classic' moment on Top of the Pops where Bowie embraced Mick Ronson.[33] Bowie was the first prominent male British pop star to label himself as non-heterosexual in the mass media, in an interview with Mike Watts: '[Bowie] supposes he's what people call bisexual'.[34] Interviewees generally remembered the significance of this as an early encounter with the language of 'bisexuality', and some had an understanding of what it meant – 'basically I thought, erm, er – David Bowie was sexually attracted to men as well as women'.[35] Patrick Glen has discussed how Bowie's 'coming out' provided 'a formula for artists to come out while retaining commercial success', such as Elton John ('I don't see why it should affect the fan

[31] Examples of this criticism include the reception of *Orange is the New Black* character Piper Chapman, who had relationships with multiple genders but was not described as bisexual on-screen until the programme's seventh series. Articles on the topic include A.J. Walkley, "Bi-erasure in *Orange is the New Black*", *The Huffington Post*, 23 August 2013, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/orange-is-the-new-black-bisexuality_b_3799037; Anna Pulley, "Why won't *Orange is the New Black* acknowledge that bisexuals exist?", *Buzzfeed.com*, 14 July 2015, https://www.buzzfeed.com/annapulley/bisexual-erasure-on-television; McKenna Ferguson, "Why *OITNB* refuses to say the word 'Bisexual'", *Pride.com*, 30 June 2016, https://www.pride.com/oitnb/2016/6/30/why-oitnb-refuses-say-word-bisexual.
[32] Interview with Curtis (pseudonym), b. 1958, 24 July 2018.
[33] Interview with Ossian (pseudonym), b. 1954, 13 August 2018.
[34] Mike Watts, "Oh You Pretty Thing!", *Melody Maker*, 22 January 1972, 19.
[35] Interview with Nigel, b. 1963, 12 January 2019.

worship that I've got… it hasn't hurt David Bowie'), Tom Robinson, Boy George and others.[36] However, Glen also points out that often discussions of Bowie can seek to fit him into a 'simplistic liberation narrative' that could itself be seen as a popular memory.[37] Bowie's death in 2016, a couple of years before the interviews, had led to extensive popular discussion about the liberatory power of his sexuality, and some interviewees may still have been influenced by this.[38] Early in my interview recruitment process I also used sources from the 1970s and 1980s to prompt discussion and reminiscences at bisexual organisations and events – one of these was an image of Bowie as Ziggy Stardust. This did not affect all interviewees, as I recruited through a wide variety of methods, but three of the six interviewees who mentioned Bowie had been at these events.[39] Although the interviews took place several months later, they may have consciously or unconsciously been prompted to mention Bowie by these initial discussions.

Although interviewees such as Curtis and Nigel (b. 1963) described Bowie as introducing them to the concept of bisexuality, at other points in their interviews they demonstrated the limitations of this impact – Nigel said that he first encountered the word 'bisexual' through Bowie's interview when he was ten, but later said he didn't realise the word bisexual 'applied to me' until he was about fourteen, while Curtis 'didn't think of the word bisexual' as relevant to his own multiple-gender-attraction until around the 1980s.[40] Although both interviewees attached significance to Bowie's 'coming out' as a moment in their own identity development, the chronologies they discussed in the rest of their interviews showed more ambivalence and

---

[36] Glen, "Oh You Pretty Thing!", 420-421.
[37] Glen, "Oh You Pretty Thing!", 421.
[38] Zack Ford, "David Bowie's Impact on Gender and Sexuality is Everywhere", *thinkprogress.org,* 11 January 2016, https://thinkprogress.org/david-bowies-impact-on-gender-and-sexuality-is-everywhere-b046c393174b/; Tim Teeman, "How David Bowie Sexually Liberated Us All", *The Daily Beast,* 11 January 2016, https://www.thedailybeast.com/how-david-bowie-sexually-liberated-us-all; Taylor Bell, "How David Bowie Made It OK to Not Be a Straight Man", *attn:,* 11 January 2016, https://archive.attn.com/stories/5106/how-david-bowie-pioneered-gender-fluidity.
[39] The three interviewees who mentioned Bowie and were recruited through talks at bisexual events were Ossian (b. 1954), Nigel (b. 1963), and Ian (b. 1962). For more discussion of recruitment methods, see the Introduction.
[40] Interview with Nigel, b. 1963, 12 January 2019; Interview with Curtis (pseudonym), b. 1958, 24 July 2018.

uncertainty.

The ambiguous impact of Bowie on the lives of these interviewees may also relate to the multiple meanings attached to his 'coming out' by the mainstream press. As Glen writes, the media employed various tactics to make Bowie 'seem straighter'.[41] This included casting doubt on his claim to be bisexual – emphasising his use of dramatic personae as distinct from his 'real' self, and repeatedly referencing his marriage to a woman and his 'heteronormative' family. Although bisexuality could of course accommodate a different-gender relationship, the emphasis on his 'good relationship' with his wife 'strengthened the idea that Bowie was putting-on the readers'.[42] Reporting also reinforced the association between bisexuality and 'taboo breaking "free love"', rather than establishing bisexuality as a distinct sexual identity, by focussing on what Glen describes as 'sexually aggressive and exploitative modes of heteronormative sexual liberation' that took place at Bowie's concerts, including nakedness and even sexual assault, and framing these as examples of primarily heterosexual 'sexual freedom' gone too far.[43] Bowie's later rejection of bisexuality also complicated this further – in an interview with Rolling Stone in 1983 entitled 'Straight Time', he described calling himself bisexual as 'the biggest mistake I ever made'.[44] This was only referenced by one interviewee, Ian, however, who framed it as Bowie 'denying' his bisexuality 'for whatever reason'.[45] Similarly, no interviewees mentioned the allegations of rape and statutory rape that were also made against Bowie.[46] They were either unaware of this, or found it impossible to reconcile this with their 'mythologised' image of Bowie as a key figure in their understandings of their sexuality. Bowie's treatment by the media, and his own actions, complicated the meanings of bisexuality, and complicated his position as a role model in some of my interviewees' narratives.

---

[41] Glen, "Oh You Pretty Thing!", 417.
[42] Glen, "Oh You Pretty Thing!", 416.
[43] Glen, "Oh You Pretty Thing!", 419.
[44] Kurt Loder, "David Bowie: Straight Time", *Rolling Stone*, 12 May 1983.
[45] Interview with Ian, b. 1962, 7 May 2019.
[46] Philip Lewis, "The Complicated Sexual History of David Bowie", *mic.com*, 12 January 2016, https://www.mic.com/articles/132399/the-complicated-sexual-history-of-david-bowie.

Other interviewees, such as Ossian (b. 1954), focussed primarily on Bowie's androgynous gender presentation.[47] This was also a key focus in media responses to Bowie: the interview in *Melody Maker* began 'with a description of Bowie's looks and attire. This was usually reserved for female artists and immediately queered Bowie'.[48] Watts described him as 'like a swishy queen, a gorgeously effeminate boy. He's as camp as a row of tents […] he shrewdly exploits the confusion surrounding the male and female roles'.[49] The association made by Ossian and the music press between Bowie's bisexuality and androgyny links to the associations between bisexuality and gender nonconformity. For Ossian, Bowie was a role model more in terms of his androgynous look than his bisexual identity: 'I thought to myself, well I was a bit out of touch, so I thought I'd look at Bowie, he's always in touch. So I – I'd go for a style something like him'.[50] Interestingly, the persona Ossian sought to emulate was the Thin White Duke rather than the bisexual Ziggy Stardust – 'I didn't really get into the Ziggy thing' – although he said that this was more due to necessity than preference, as he had curly hair that needed gelling back with a 'green sticky' pomade.[51]

Several of my interviewees therefore engaged with the 'mythologised figure' of Bowie, although in various different ways. Although some echoed the popular narrative that his 'coming out' in 1972 'was responsible for opening up questions of sexual identity which had previously been repressed, ignored or merely hinted at in rock and youth culture', closer analysis of these interviews suggests that his influence on identity formation was less direct than the interviewees themselves stated – in part due to the conflicting images of bisexuality and sexual transgression in media responses to Bowie.[52] In terms of gender, some male interviewees were influenced by Bowie's androgyny, but female interviewees generally didn't mention Bowie at all, or suggested

[47] Interview with Ossian (pseudonym), b. 1954, 13 August 2018.
[48] Glen, "Oh You Pretty Thing!", 414.
[49] Glen, "Oh You Pretty Thing!", 415.
[50] Interview with Ossian (pseudonym), b. 1954, 13 August 2018.
[51] Interview with Ossian (pseudonym), b. 1954, 13 August 2018.
[52] Hebdige, *Subculture*, 61-63.

that his impact on their lives and identities was minimal.

Punk

Discussions of punk often overlapped with discussions of Bowie.[53] Dick Hebdige describes punk as an 'addendum to the "text" of glam rock', one that sought to undercut some of the elegance and ornate style of glam rock performers like Bowie, but that did so using the same 'language' of parody and symbolism.[54] Lucy Robinson argues that 'punk identity can be traced back through the androgynous persona of British performers like David Bowie', and issues of sexuality and androgyny were pertinent to both.[55]

While other interviewees described Bowie as the first instance of learning about the term 'bisexual', Ossian said that the first people he had heard say out loud that they were bisexual were members of the Bromley Contingent, followers of the Sex Pistols: 'I went over to them and said, you know, are you gay? And they said "no, we're bisexual"'.[56] Interviewees focussed in particular on punk's relationship to gender, highlighting androgyny as an important area of punk culture. Curtis highlighted 'the style, the clothing', and said 'I liked the androgynous side of it'.[57] Chryssy more explicitly linked this to her own identity as a trans woman, and the freeing potential of the 'conflation of […] youth culture and outrageous dress', which meant that she could wear 'random women's clothes' and experiment with make-up.[58] The role of place was significant in her experience of punk, as she lived in Hull – punk 'took a while to percolate up to Hull […] so you had kind of a mix of alternative cultures, simultaneously'.[59] Other interviewees focussed on memories of punk that were not directly linked to sexuality or gender, but more general nostalgic reflections on youth, such as Neil (b. 1958): 'it was new, and it was exciting, and it was rebellion […] you

[53] Hebdige, *Subculture*, 61-63.
[54] Hebdige, *Subculture*, 63.
[55] Robinson, *Gay Men and the Left*, 104.
[56] Interview with Ossian (pseudonym), b. 1954, 13 August 2018.
[57] Interview with Curtis (pseudonym), b. 1958, 24 July 2018.
[58] Interview with Chryssy, b. 1962, 12 September 2018.
[59] Interview with Chryssy, b. 1962, 12 September 2018.

know, teenagers, right, you want to rebel'.[60]

Robinson explicitly links punk to gay identity: 'Punk and gay identity were understood at the time, and have continued to be understood, as having a particular affinity with each other'.[61] The term 'punk' itself was also historically linked to homosexuality: according to Peter Burton the term originates from Polari, the form of slang used mainly by gay men, meaning 'virginal young homosexual', and in American prison slang it meant a male prostitute.[62] However, Robinson's focus on gay identity mean she overlooks the ways in which punk might more appropriately be associated with multiple-gender-attraction. For example, although Pete Shelley of the Buzzcocks explicitly described the punk era as 'generally bi-sexual', Robinson links him to 'a particularly queer branch of Punk' through his appearance on Top of the Pops in an 'I love boys' badge, which she uses as evidence of gayness rather than multiple-gender-attraction.[63] David JoHanson of the New York Dolls defined himself as 'tri-sexual' and willing to 'try anything', but Robinson frames this not as an expression of multiple-gender-attraction, but as a 'public relations dodge' that reinforced his 'heterosexuality'.[64] Tom Robinson is discussed in relation to GLF and *Glad to be Gay*, but the fact that he was later rejected by the gay scene for coming out as bisexual is not acknowledged. Robinson thus primarily discusses multiple-gender-attraction in punk as evidence of punk's 'parasitic' relationship to the gay scene, rather than as something imbricated in punk in its own right.

I would argue that, rather than punk being 'really' gay, straight or bisexual, the equivocal declarations by punk stars were part of a more 'ambiguous Punk sexuality' that, as Marc Almond argued, was 'outside of both the straight and the gay worlds'.[65] Although punk did not generally provide clear representation for bisexual identity, its resistance towards categorisation – in terms

[60] Interview with Neil (pseudonym), b. 1958, 26 September 2018.
[61] Robinson, *Gay Men and the Left*, 104.
[62] Robinson, *Gay Men and the Left*, 104.
[63] Robinson, *Gay Men and the Left*, 106.
[64] Robinson, *Gay Men and the Left*, 105.
[65] Robinson, *Gay Men and the Left*, 105-106.

of both androgyny and potential multiple-gender-attraction – was precisely what made it appeal to many of my interviewees. Although historical narratives of punk sexuality often focus on whether or not it could be considered 'gay', then, it was precisely the ambiguity and fluidity of punk that made it appeal to many interviewees – perhaps especially those whose identities were also difficult to pin down.

However, not all interviewees' memories of punk were positive. Ossian also talked about how he felt put off from going to punk concerts due to the threat of homophobic violence from skinheads: 'People I fancied would be more punk. But I didn't go to many punk places to meet them, because we were worried too much about violence […] it gets you down'.[66] Punk was an important area of popular culture referenced by several interviewees, but it did not always fit into a nostalgic popular memory – the feeling of having 'missed out' due to homophobia was a more negative memory that Ossian also associated with punk.

Gender and Popular Culture

Although punk and Bowie were the two most frequently-referenced examples of popular culture by my interviewees, there were significant differences in how different genders remembered popular culture. For example, despite Bowie's transgressive approach to gender, he was viewed as a role model solely by male interviewees. Lisa said that she 'was never a David Bowie person'.[67] Alison (b. 1967) did describe herself self-consciously as 'a massive Bowie fan […] the bi cliché', but this was a relatively recent development, as she grew up with the 'rubbish '80s Bowie' rather than the '70s Bowie [who] was actually kind of interesting'.[68]

Female interviewees were also more likely to mention books in their discussions of popular culture, both fiction and non-fiction. Gwen said that she was reading lots of 'books about homosexuality', which also described bisexuality – from 'psychiatric textbooks' to 'trashy'

[66] Interview with Ossian (pseudonym), b. 1954, 13 August 2018.
[67] Interview with Lisa, b. 1954, 4 April 2019.
[68] Interview with Alison (pseudonym), b. 1967, 5 October 2018.

novels.[69] Judith (b. 1954) reflected on 'some books, that I read then, [which] completely blew my mind', referencing an impressively long list of primarily feminist texts from Sidney Abbott and Barbara Love's *Sappho Was a Right-On Woman* (1972) to Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976) – although this was facilitated by the fact that the interview was taking place in her study, so she was able to reference the books on her shelves more easily than Dave (b. 1960), for example, who struggled to recall influential books from memory.[70]

The different aspects of popular culture referenced by interviewees of different genders could also be linked to the class dynamic at play in the interviews. Although interviewees were from a wide range of class backgrounds in childhood, more female interviewees were educated and middle-class at the time of our interviews. Gwen, Judith, Carmen (b. 1949) and Elsa (b. 1951) had all been employed as educators, either in schools or at universities. They were therefore potentially more likely to refer to books, even 'trashy' ones, as a reflection of their cultural consumption and class position.

Furthermore, the books that they referenced were particularly feminist and female-oriented. Lucy Delap has emphasised the importance of reading cultures, feminist presses and feminist bookshops to the Women's Liberation Movement: 'reading has long been a central activity for feminists', and Judith commented: 'I *read* and *read* and *read*'.[71] There was a wider network of 'alternative' bookshops and presses that proliferated in the 1970s and early 1980s, but the Women's Liberation Movement was particularly committed to the 'discussion and development of political analysis unhindered by patriarchal values […] a means of establishing our own culture', and thus many specifically women-only and/or feminist bookshops and presses were established.[72] Two women I interviewed – Vera and Louise (b. 1966) – had been involved in producing feminist magazines, and referenced the network of feminist and radical bookshops

[69] Interview with Gwen (pseudonym), b. 1951, 9 October 2018.
[70] Interview with Judith (pseudonym), b. 1954, 11 October 2018.
[71] Delap, "Feminist Bookshops", 171; Interview with Judith (pseudonym), b. 1954, 11 October 2018.
[72] Onlywomen Press, quoted in Delap, "Feminist Bookshops", 173.

that were key to distributing them.[73] As a result, feminist women interviewees were more likely to see reading as a key part of their engagement with popular culture.

As discussed in Chapter One, sexual politics in the 1970s and 1980s was divided along fairly binary lines of 'gay men' and 'lesbians', which several interviewees mentioned during their interviews: 'lesbians and gay men didn't get on together for quite a while, there was a big – big rift'.[74] The feminist texts that interviewees tended to mention were generally not specifically bisexual, although Judith owned a copy of Wolff's *Bisexuality: A Study;* and both Judith and Elsa referenced *Woman on the Edge of Time*, which depicted a utopian future where multiple-gender-attraction was the norm. Other books were specifically lesbian, or, more frequently, generally influential feminist texts that did not focus on specific sexualities. This links back to another point made in Chapter One, about the blurred lines between 'women's' culture and 'lesbian' culture during the 1970s and 1980s. Feminist popular culture was generally portrayed by interviewees in a nostalgic light: 'completely blew my mind […] gave me – an idea of, that I could have a future'.[75] As male interviewees tended to be nostalgic for the 'bisexual representation' provided by Bowie, or the ambiguous and androgynous 'punk sexuality', female interviewees were also nostalgic for and emphasised the positive significance of the aspects of popular culture that they focussed on, which tended to be feminist and women's-oriented publications.

Interviewees therefore used popular culture to emphasise alternative, more positive memories of the 1970s and 1980s – and especially the 1970s – than those allowed by narratives of political and economic crisis. My interviewees were not the only people to do so, however. Similar emphases can also be found in, for example, responses to a *BBC News magazine* survey of readers' memories of the 1970s. Fashion, music and television were referenced more frequently than any traditionally 'political' developments: 'Bay City Rollers, David Cassidy and Ziggy

[73] Interview with Vera (pseudonym), b. 1960, 26 October 2018; Interview with Louise, b. 1966, 27 July 2018.
[74] Interview with Vera (pseudonym), b. 1960, 26 October 2018.
[75] Interview with Judith (pseudonym), b. 1954, 11 October 2018.

Stardust. Wide leg trousers, staypress trousers, Ben Sherman checked shirts, tank tops and Cromby coats'.[76] These memories of 'popular culture', particularly youth culture, were often more positive and nostalgic: 'Brown nylon clothes, Red Barrel, Action Man, Million Dollar Man, Wonder Woman […] Happy days – the heyday of childhood! I wouldn't have wanted to grow up in any other era!!', 'A teenager in London, what a great time it was […] seeing bands every night […] what a great life that was'.[77] Many of my interviewees also expressed nostalgia in relation to the popular culture of the 1970s, not least because most interviewees were in their teens or early twenties during this period. This therefore suggests that memories of popular culture in the 1970s could be used to create an alternative, more positive popular memory of the decade. This alternative popular memory was not solely related to popular culture, as I will discuss in the next section, but popular culture was a key part of it.

Change Over Time

Liberation and Reaction

Prevailing political discourses in the twenty-first century have generally presumed that the 1970s were so terrible that the decade can be treated as a kind of shorthand to dismiss specific policies. For example, Labour leaders such as Gordon Brown, Ed Miliband and – particularly – Jeremy Corbyn were all accused by their opponents of 'taking Britain back to the 1970s'.[78] Brown sought to distance himself from this image of the 1970s, 'warning' trades unions in 2008 that

---

[76] Caroline Lloyd, quoted in "What the 1970s meant to you", *BBC News Magazine*, 7 June 2007, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/magazine/6729701.stm.
[77] Jason Simpson and Mr Diamond, quoted in "What the 1970s meant to you".
[78] David Cameron, "David Cameron's New Year message", *Conservative Home*, 30 December 2008, https://conservativehome.blogs.com/torydiary/2008/12/david-camerons.html;
Steven Swinford, "Ed Miliband wants to 'return Britain to 1970s class warfare'", *The Telegraph*, 20 April 2015, https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/politics/ed-miliband/11550033/Ed-Miliband-wants-to-return-Britain-to-1970s-class-warfare.html;
Tim Newark, "Jeremy Corbyn's mad plan would take Britain back to the 1970s, writes Tim Newark", *The Express*, 12 May 2017, https://www.express.co.uk/comment/expresscomment/803565/jeremy-corbyn-general-election-2017-plan-take-britain-1970s-labour-manifesto-tim-newark.

there would be 'no return to the 1970s'.[79] More recently, however, left-wingers have begun to try to rehabilitate the decade, often by deploying memories of different eras: 'I'd rather be dragged back to Jeremy Corbyn's 1970s than Theresa May's 1950s', 'better back to the 1970s with Jeremy Corbyn than 1870s with Tories'.[80] This could suggest that in the late 2010s the popular memory of the 1970s is beginning to shift away from a narrative dominated by ideas of political and economic crisis – although crushing electoral defeat in 2019 suggests that efforts to 'reclaim' the 1970s did not sufficiently endear Corbyn's Labour to the electorate.

As discussed above, alternative, more positive memories of the 1970s often revolved around popular culture. Interviewees' memories of Bowie and punk centred on the 1970s, and recollections about the transformational impact of Bowie or the excitement and rebellion of punk were inherently nostalgic. Curtis even linked his memories of his involvement in the Gay Teenage Group during the 1970s to his nostalgia for punk: 'it's also exciting to be at the forefront of something. Like the early punks were. To be… cutting new edge, if you like. So we were, we were cutting edge, in that gay youth group. Definitely'.[81] However, it was not just through popular culture references that interviewees expressed nostalgia for the 1970s. Ossian also echoed feelings about breaking influential new ground, in his case in relation to South London GLF, which focussed on political impact: 'I don't think erm – Ken Livingstone's politics would've been as *cool* on sexuality, but for the gay – South London Gay Liberation Front. He saw it, and he – it really impacted on him'.[82] The memories that many interviewees communicated of the 1970s were not in line with popular narratives of crisis, but of personal and political freedom and creativity.

---

[79] Robert Winnett, "Gordon Brown tells trade unions 'no return to the 1970s'", *The Telegraph*, 6 July 2008, https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/politics/labour/2258770/Gordon-Brown-tells-trade-unions-no-return-to-1970s.html.
[80] Brian Reade, "I'd rather be dragged back to Jeremy Corbyn's 1970s than Theresa May's 1950s", *The Mirror*, 12 May 2017, https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/politics/id-dragged-back-back-jeremy-10409492; Richard Hassall, "Labour leadership: better back to the 1970s with Jeremy Corbyn than 1870s with Tories", *The Observer*, 30 August 2015, https://www.theguardian.com/theobserver/2015/aug/30/the-big-issue-labour-leadership.
[81] Interview with Curtis (pseudonym), b. 1958, 24 July 2018.
[82] Interview with Ossian (pseudonym), b. 1954, 13 August 2018.

Interviewees who compared between the 1970s and 1980s generally presented the 1970s as a period of excitement and liberation and the 1980s as a time of hostility and fear. Curtis talked about 'that very liberating period of the late '70s, early '80s, and then it all went downhill'.[83] This 'downhill' was focussed on sexuality in particular, but used to characterise the whole decade: 'I think it [AIDS] really put a whole… dampener, on the whole gay scene. And then of course that was followed by the, erm, Thatcher's Clause 28'.[84]

This nostalgic narrative of liberation and freedom in the 1970s could be seen as its own popular memory, albeit one that contradicts a more common narrative of political and economic crisis. Ossian referenced this 'romantic' popular memory in his interview, and had a difficult relationship to it. Although in the first half of the interview he had generally painted a nostalgic picture of the 1970s, after a break for lunch he was careful to note: 'that was the – you know, the good side […] poems are written about that as well [that romanticise], all the, you know, *struggle*'.[85] He then went on to discuss 'the other side', which included memories of violence and racial tension, as well as particularly difficult memories of how his partner at the time was attacked and almost raped on two occasions. Ossian was explicit about wanting to counteract some of the nostalgic portrayals of the 1970s that he had been echoing up to that point in the interview: 'I'm giving you the romantic side […] but it was *horrific*'.[86] At this point in the interview, then, Ossian used his personal experiences to contradict a popular nostalgic narrative.

In Curtis's reflections on the 1970s and 1980s, he juxtaposed nostalgia for the 1970s with a sense that 'it all went downhill' in the 1980s with the onset of AIDS and Clause 28. Clause 28 and Section 28 were discussed in several of the interviews – perhaps especially because, as discussed above, various events had been held in 2018 to mark the anniversary of the clause coming into law. The popular narrative constructed by these commemorations was generally

[83] Interview with Curtis (pseudonym), b. 1958, 24 July 2018.
[84] Interview with Curtis (pseudonym), b. 1958, 24 July 2018.
[85] Interview with Ossian (pseudonym), b. 1954, 13 August 2018.
[86] Interview with Ossian (pseudonym), b. 1954, 13 August 2018.

about the protests before the law was changed, and the isolating and stigmatising effect it had on gay or LGBTQ students and teachers once it had been passed, as in this comment in the *Guardian*: 'there was certainly a difference in school environments. A lot of teachers did not want to deal with the subject out of fear […] it allowed a lot of misinformation, prejudice and abuse to go unchallenged'.[87]

Some interviewees agreed with this narrative. For example, Alison remembered her experience at the anti-Clause march in Manchester: 'an absolutely massive crowd […] it was kind of scary […] but it felt good to actually stand up for the whole community'.[88] In terms of Section 28's impact, she focussed on the 'ignorance and silence' it generated, which she felt had a 'crippling' effect on 'self-awareness' and 'growth': 'Section 28 had huge consequences. For all of us, really'.[89] Many interviewees linked Section 28 to wider hostility in the 1980s, especially linked to Thatcherism: 'people's attitudes really had… changed in a negative way? […] *because* the current government was so negative', 'you know, horrible times, like Section 28 where society was actively massing against us', 'it was very much all part and parcel of a Thatcherite, erm… government that we […] despised and detested *anyway*'.[90]

However, others differed from this popular narrative. In particular, two former teachers emphasised the role of specific individuals in mitigating the effects of Section 28. Judith said 'I don't think Section 28 made any difference to me, personally'.[91] This was because the head teacher and other teachers in the school she worked in 'thought it was absolutely a load of nonsense […] the state had no business meddling in this'.[92] She acknowledged that her experience

---

[87] Michael Dance, quoted in Chris Godfrey, "Section 28 protestors 30 years on: 'We were arrested and put in a cell up by Big Ben'", *The Guardian*, 27 March 2018, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/mar/27/section-28-protesters-30-years-on-we-were-arrested-and-put-in-a-cell-up-by-big-ben.
[88] Interview with Alison (pseudonym), b. 1967, 5 October 2018.
[89] Interview with Alison (pseudonym), b. 1967, 5 October 2018.
[90] Interview with Alison (pseudonym), b. 1967, 5 October 2018; Interview with Kate, b. 1960, 31 August 2019; Interview with Gwen (pseudonym), b. 1951, 9 October 2018.
[91] Interview with Judith (pseudonym), b. 1954, 11 October 2018.
[92] Interview with Judith (pseudonym), b. 1954, 11 October 2018.

would 'probably have been very different' in a different school, but reiterated that 'Section 28 didn't make any difference to me'.[93] Elsa had a very similar perspective: 'the school that I got a job in […] had a very fantastic right-on [head] teacher, so it was never a – never an issue, for me, you know'.[94] Although these were only two examples, it seems that interviewees who had direct experience of working in schools found that individual managers could limit the impact of the law, and thus differed from the popular memories of Section 28 that were particularly prevalent at the time of our interviews. For other interviewees, Section 28 mattered less in terms of direct personal impact and more as an example of a general sense of societal and governmental homophobia in the later 1980s.

Rigid Lines

It was not only in terms of external, institutional homophobia that interviewees understood the 1980s as a period going 'downhill' after the 'liberating' 1970s. They also reflected on divisions amongst gay and bisexual people, especially in the 1980s. For example, Lisa argued: 'You have to remember that the '70s were *much* more sexually experimental. We didn't form up into rigid lines until – into, into the '80s […] the attitude of the '80s was very much to pick a side, and stick to it'.[95] This was linked to her perception of the 1980s as a decade: 'I also think it's a function of the times […] and the politics'.[96] In Lisa's view, this was manifested in hostility towards bisexuality and multiple-gender-attraction for not 'pick[ing] a side', as well as 'rules […] about what it meant to be a good gay or a good lesbian'.[97] In particular, this was exemplified for Lisa and other interviewees by the 'lesbian sex wars' over SM and pornography. Louise characterised these as 'really very very intense, erm, and… erm… polarising, at the time', leaving 'no group or institution […] unscathed'.[98]

[93] Interview with Judith (pseudonym), b. 1954, 11 October 2018.
[94] Interview with Elsa (pseudonym), b. 1951, 29 January 2019.
[95] Interview with Lisa, b. 1954, 4 April 2019.
[96] Interview with Lisa, b. 1954, 4 April 2019.
[97] Interview with Lisa, b. 1954, 4 April 2019.
[98] Interview with Louise, b. 1966, 27 July 2018.

As discussed in Chapter One, most of my interviewees were critical of the anti-SM and anti-pornography feminists. Both Lisa and Louise characterised them as 'ridiculous'.[99] Lisa portrayed them as humourless, recalling the fact that she was criticised as 'a known S and M-er' and banned from the women's floor of the London Lesbian and Gay Centre for being 'too controversial': 'I got into a lot of hot water by taking the piss out of things in the '80s'.[100] No interviewees explicitly positioned themselves on the opposing side of the debates – that is, against both pornography and SM – although Judith was slightly more critical. She described a protest of SM lesbians 'in a lot of leathers with chains and – whips' as being 'absolutely *dire* […] they wouldn't *stop*' but was hesitant in relation to pornography: 'I don't approve of the objectification of women, or the, erm, oppression of women. But equally, er…. I'm fairly – liberal around pornography. Sounds terrible, doesn't it?'.[101]

This arguably reflects a popular narrative of extreme 'second wave' feminism in the 1980s, particularly in the context of generational differences between feminists. These interviewees may have been so critical of anti-pornography and anti-SM feminists because they surmised that my age meant I would take a more 'sex-positive' position. On the other hand, Judith's self-conscious 'sounds terrible, doesn't it?' seems to suggest that she expected I might be *less* 'liberal' around pornography than she was, in contrast to the mainstream perspective on younger feminists. I will discuss these generational differences, and interviewee's perceptions of these differences, in greater detail below. The attitudes of most interviewees towards the 'lesbian sex wars' were also reflective of the links made between the anti-pornography and anti-SM position and hostility towards bisexuals, as discussed in Chapters One and Two. In this context, it is also significant that Judith, who was most critical of SM and pornography, identified as lesbian rather than bisexual, for feminist reasons. The 'lesbian sex wars' still appeared to divide feminists decades later, and interviewees often used popular memories of 'second-wave' feminists as

[99] Interview with Lisa, b. 1954, 4 April 2019; Interview with Louise, b. 1966, 27 July 2018.
[100] Interview with Lisa, b. 1954, 4 April 2019.
[101] Interview with Judith (pseudonym), b. 1954, 11 October 2018.

'ridiculous' and censorious, even as they themselves identified as feminists and remembered their own feminism in the 1970s and 1980s as being generally more detached, laid-back and reasonable.

Some interviewees also disagreed with the popular memory of intra-community division in the 1980s. Vera referred to Section 28 and AIDS to argue that these issues actually led to *greater* solidarity in the 1980s: 'Around that time it was Section 28, and AIDS and everything, it just all came back together. Because – you know, there's just some things that unite people, and those things did. And it's never quite split apart again since'.[102] Judith described her consciousness-raising group as bringing together a 'very disparate' group of women, of varying ages and sexualities: 'we were very disparate, but […] we also shared a lot of interests in feminism, peace, environmental stuff'.[103] Her memories of feminist activism in the 1980s focussed more on making connections between different groups and issues, rather than on division. Even Louise, who talked at greater length about the 'lesbian sex wars', was nostalgic for other aspects of feminist activism in the 1980s: 'there were straight women involved, there were… there were bisexual women […] there were a lot of, you know, a lot of lesbians […] I felt like I'd… kind of fallen in love with my girl-ness […] I had a *really* good time in the eighties'.[104] Although sweeping statements about the 1970s and 1980s interviewees tended to characterise it as a period of liberation followed by reaction and division, then, more specific individual memories complicate this broader picture.

The Present Moment

Current Affairs

As the Popular Memory Group argued, interviewees consistently related their memories of the 1970s and 1980s to their 'contemporary consciousness'.[105] This involved references to

[102] Interview with Vera (pseudonym), b. 1960, 8 November 2018.
[103] Interview with Judith (pseudonym), b. 1954, 11 October 2018.
[104] Interview with Louise, b. 1966, 27 July 2018.
[105] Popular Memory Group, *Popular Memory?*, 17. Emphasis in source.

their lives at the time of our interview, their opinions on current events and debates, and their sense of generational difference from me as a younger, 'millennial' interviewer.

As Mills found in relation to women's memories of the 1960s, her interviewees' subsequent life experiences affected how they understood 'both their youth and public discourses'.[106] This was also true for my interviewees. For example Aidan (b. 1971) had only began to identify as bisexual and nonbinary from around 2010, and said that 'in the last three or four years I've got more interested and more active in the LGBTQ movement'.[107] He therefore generally remembered the 1970s and 1980s as a period of struggle and difficulty before eventual self-realisation, in a narrative of transformation. He repeatedly compared the late twentieth century to earlier periods: 'it sounds like I'm talking about 1880 or something, but I'm not […] you know, this isn't 1892, you know, this is [nineteen] ninety… three'.[108] The present moment was seen as distinctly different to the past, with a wealth of communities and resources that he had not previously been able to access: 'and I want to stress… *none* of this was available, *NONE* of this was available, *nothing*… zero'.[109]

Other interviewees had also changed their identities over time – Louise identified as lesbian until around 2002, then 'came out' as bisexual; Curtis initially identified as gay and then later as bisexual; Vera identified as bisexual until 1984, then lesbian, and then bisexual again after 2000.[110] Their own life narratives obviously affected their perspectives on the past, although not always in consistent ways – for example, Vera disassociated herself from many of the trans-exclusionary and anti-SM politics she had held as a lesbian, which I will discuss in more detail below, whereas Louise viewed her perspective as fairly consistent across her lifetime: 'I was always… sort of sympathetic [to bisexuals]'.[111] Another way in which interviewees' lives had

[106] Mills, "Using the personal", 479.
[107] Interview with Aidan, b. 1971, 22 June 2018.
[108] Interview with Aidan, b. 1971, 22 June 2018.
[109] Interview with Aidan, b. 1971, 22 June 2018.
[110] Interview with Louise, b. 1966, 27 July 2018; Interview with Curtis (pseudonym), b. 1958, 24 July 2018; Interview with Vera (pseudonym), b. 1960, 26 October 2018.
[111] Interview with Louise, b. 1966, 27 July 2018.

changed since the 1970s and 1980s was in relation to their relationships, as discussed in more detail in Chapter Four. Mills discusses how an interviewee's divorce affected her perspectives on the 1960s: 'the narrative of Jacqueline's interview was centred on justifying and explaining her divorce'.[112] My interview with Neil was similarly focussed on both his divorce and his new partner, whom he considered to be 'the right person'.[113] His memories of the 1970s and 1980s were therefore affected by his experience in what he retrospectively considered to be the 'wrong' relationship: 'if I'd been open about being bisexual from the beginning, may – I would've met the right person, earlier'.[114]

Interviewees repeatedly referenced current events and the present moment at the time of the interviews. Both Aidan and Ian talked about the importance of the internet, particularly in relation to building or strengthening communities. Ian said that the 'the impact of email has been huge' in removing location-based constraints – early National Bisexual Conferences, which he had helped to co-ordinate, were organised by small groups that met in person, but email had reduced the need for this.[115] Aidan focussed on how the internet had *enabled* physical meetings, because living in rural Northamptonshire he had previously been unable to find out about LGBTQ-focussed events: 'this is where the Internet started to come in, because – ah, finally, you could find out where these – these minorities are, where they meet, where they were doing this, that and the other'.[116] This was contrasted to the past, where he repeatedly emphasised there was: '*no* social media, *no* internet, *no* mobile phones… *very* very few articles [about sexuality] in newspapers, if you were lucky'.[117] For Aidan, and to a lesser extent Ian, the internet was part of a linear narrative about improvement over time, in their individual lives but also in the wider world.

---

[112] Mills, "Using the personal", 475.
[113] Interview with Neil (pseudonym), b. 1958, 26 September 2018.
[114] Interview with Neil (pseudonym), b. 1958, 26 September 2018.
[115] Interview with Ian, b. 1962, 7 May 2019.
[116] Interview with Aidan, b. 1971, 22 June 2018.
[117] Interview with Aidan, b. 1971, 22 June 2018.

Another topic that was often linked to the interview context was the environment. Some interviewees had been particularly involved in environmental and anti-nuclear activism during the 1980s, such as Judith, who had helped to found Friends of the Earth in her local area and visited Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp; Elsa, who had been involved in animal rights protests and had helped to found a local Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament group; and Vera, who had attended Greenham and other peace camps, and had been involved in pagan groups that focussed on feminist spirituality. At the time of our interviews environmental concerns were becoming more prominent in public discourse, especially given the formation of Extinction Rebellion and the School Strikes for Climate in October 2018.

Judith and Vera, who were interviewed in October 2018, both touched on the present day in relation to environmental issues, although in fairly pessimistic ways. Vera said that 'it really felt, in those days, like – erm – the world was about to end, any moment […] in a way that seems mad now, although it's starting to seem like it again in some respects'.[118] Judith referred to a meeting of the EU Environment Council that had taken place two days prior to our interview, as part of an argument that 'some things [now] are – actually are worse? […] our whole sense of, er, sustainability and what this planet can manage has just got completely out of hand. […] Well, we heard, didn't we. Two days ago. We just cannot carry on like this'.[119]

My interview with Elsa, however, in January 2019, was slightly more positive: 'I think it [the peace movement of the 1980s] was great, it's a bit like […] Extinction Rebellion *now*, and how that is for people *now* […] a huge movement of like-minded people'.[120] Of course, this difference could simply be explained by differences in the interviewees' individual approaches and personalities, but I would argue that the increasing prominence of environmental protests by January 2019 had an impact on the different ways in which interviewees linked their memories of the 1980s to the present day. Issues that were still active and developing in 2018 and 2019

[118] Interview with Vera (pseudonym), b. 1960, 26 October 2018.
[119] Interview with Judith (pseudonym), b. 1954, 11 October 2018.
[120] Interview with Elsa (pseudonym), b. 1951, 29 January 2019.

therefore had a significant effect on how interviewees reflected back on the late twentieth-century.

Other present-day issues that were raised in interviews related to debates and tensions that were specifically focussed on 'LGBTQ' topics. For example, Louise reflected positively on the inclusion of 'Q' for 'Queer' in the acronym – 'even if it's only lip service, the language we use […] is more inclusive' – and Lisa said that although a lot of people of her generation found the label 'queer' difficult, she found it very 'handy' as a means of avoiding the acronym altogether: 'I can't *stand* the alphabet salad of LGBTQ-I-A, whatever'.[121] Elsa, on the other hand, was more hesitant about the concept of 'queer', because she felt that it was an umbrella description that 'lesbians are a bit lost inside, or ignored inside'.[122] Another, related issue of 'LGBTQ' inclusion that was raised by many interviewees was the inclusion and rights of trans people, often in the specific context of contemporaneous debates over reform of the Gender Recognition Act (GRA), the consultation for which was ongoing during the summer and autumn of 2018. As discussed in previous chapters, two of my interviewees were trans: Chryssy, who was a trans woman, and Aidan, who was nonbinary. Both of them mentioned current hostility towards trans people, although not in the specific context of the GRA. Aidan talked briefly about being shocked by the existence of trans exclusionary radical feminists: 'That *really* shocks me. I, I find that staggering. Erm… I thought that amongst communities that suffered such discrimination there would be a… an ability to… have an open mind, and not be discriminating against other types of community, and this isn't the case. And it's a great shame'.[123] Chryssy's discussion of political change over the decades included talking about her sense that the present was a moment of 'reaction' and 'pushback': 'in the early part of this decade, lots of trans people felt very empowered and very, you know, there's a big increase in visibility and confidence, erm, but there's always pushback,

[121] Interview with Louise, b. 1966, 27 July 2018; Interview with Lisa, b. 1954, 4 April 2019
[122] Interview with Elsa (pseudonym), b. 1951, 29 January 2019.
[123] Interview with Aidan, b. 1971, 22 June 2018.

and the pushback is now'.[124]

Other interviewees made more specific references to the debates around GRA reform. All of these interviewees were cisgender women, and the topic generally arose in conversations about feminism. Their attitudes varied. Women who declared themselves supportive of trans rights often compared trans exclusionary perspectives to debates in the 1980s, as a way of highlighting continuities or regression. Alison spoke about the 'current nonsense and furore with – trans exclusive rad fems', and compared it to people's attitudes at the time Section 28 was introduced – '*Absolutely* hideous. Erm… which I suppose is why I do LGBT activism as well as bi activism'.[125] The comparisons between Section 28 and trans exclusionary feminism also occurred in some contemporaneous discussions in progressive media: '[In 1980s discourses] gay people were sexual predators; a "gay lobby" was brainwashing children […] Replace "gay" with "trans", and that's the state of the British press in 2017'.[126] Drawing links between increased hostility to trans people in the late 2010s, and hostility towards gay people in the 1980s, was therefore a relatively popular way to draw attention to the regressiveness and perceived hypocrisy of trans exclusionary feminists, especially when they were also lesbian. Lisa also compared the 'transphobia that's going around' to discourses in the 1980s, although she compared it to the lesbian sex wars rather than Section 28: '[The lesbian sex wars] were *ridiculous*, in retrospect. But then I suspect […] in retrospect, we're going to think how ridiculous a lot of the transphobia that's going around [now] is'.[127] This historical link also highlighted the regressiveness of trans exclusionary feminists, but situated it in a history of divisions amongst feminists, rather than primarily state-organised exclusion. This parallels the differences discussed above between

[124] Interview with Chryssy, b. 1962, 12 September 2018.
[125] Interview with Alison (pseudonym), b. 1967, 5 October 2018.
[126] Ruth Hunt, "30 years ago, the conversations we had about Section 28 were the same as the ones we have about trans rights today", *The Independent*, 24 May 2018, https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/section-28-school-sexuality-education-gay-lgbt-trans-rights-thatcher-a8366751.html; Owen Jones, "Anti-trans zealots, know this: history will judge you", *The Guardian*, 15 December 2017, https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/dec/15/trans-backlash-anti-gay-zealotry-section-28-homophobia.
[127] Interview with Lisa, b. 1954, 4 April 2019.

narratives of the 1980s that focussed on 'Thatcherite' government repression, and those that focussed more on 'rigid lines' and division amongst the 'LGBTQ community'.

Three interviewees who were more hostile towards trans inclusion were Elsa, Judith and Carmen. Both Elsa and Judith identified as lesbian for political reasons. This would reinforce the binaries often created in narratives of the 'lesbian sex wars', as discussed in Chapter One – the idea that political lesbian feminists were also more likely to be hostile to trans people, bisexuals and SM, whereas bisexuals were natural 'allies' to trans people. However, Carmen's interview undermined these binary distinctions – she described herself as pansexual and had never previously identified as lesbian, but was still hostile to trans women. She described a trans woman she knew whose 'egotism' she saw as representative of trans people in general, and misgendered her in the process: 'as quite a few trans people are, he [*sic*] was very very focussed on himself, he was *incredibly* egotistical'.[128] Carmen demonstrated that bisexuals and those attracted to multiple genders were not inevitably closer 'allies' towards trans people than lesbians. Hostility towards trans people was often linked to other viewpoints, such as a politicised understanding of lesbian identity that focussed on penetrative sex with men as a key vector of oppression, and therefore often focussed on genitalia and also rejected bisexuality. However, this was not exclusively the case, and people identifying as bisexual – or even, in Carmen's case, pansexual, a label which was devised in part to move away from adherence to binary gender – could also display hostility towards trans people and trans inclusion.

Another important aspect of the discussions around trans inclusion and GRA reform was the discomposure that some interviewees displayed when expressing trans-exclusionary views. Although Judith and Elsa were hostile towards trans inclusion, they were quite cautious and defensive in expressing these views. Judith did not explicitly mention trans people at all, instead more obliquely emphasising the importance of women-only spaces and lesbian-only spaces.[129]

---

[128] Interview with Carmen (pseudonym), b. 1949, 31 May 2019.
[129] Interview with Judith (pseudonym), b. 1954, 11 October 2018.

Elsa began her discussion of trans people by saying that she sat 'on the fence' about it, but later in the interview was more explicitly critical:

> it's the – male to female transsexuals are the ones that are getting all the attention and the limelight and doing all the – the fighting, and whatever – to the expense of… lesbians, now – and also I worry that maybe […] young people that may have considered themselves to be lesbian or gay in the past, think they have to transition, to be who they are, and I don't think that's necessarily the case [*laughs slightly*].[130]

Elsa's concerns about young people thinking they 'have to transition' utilised a fairly common trope in transphobic discourses, suggesting that trans people were more accepted by society than gender-nonconforming gay men or lesbians, and that recognition for trans people was available 'too easily' or had gone 'too far'.[131] However, these prejudices were expressed subtly, and would not be immediately apparent to those less acquainted with the discourses surrounding GRA reform. Carmen framed her hostility slightly more overtly, in terms of 'discomfort' around trans women 'representing themselves as… always having been women', but simultaneously fetishized their perceived gender 'transgression'.[132] Although she seemed more 'composed' when discussing this than Judith or Elsa, she still took pains to emphasise, perhaps defensively, that she had friends who were trans women. Interviewees therefore often expressed transphobia in covert or hesitant ways.

I would argue that the discomposure some interviewees displayed around discussing radical feminism and specifically trans people came from their understanding of generational differences between us. These women were born at the end of the 1940s and the beginning of the 1950s. Not all interviewees born around this time expressed the same views – Gwen, born in 1951, did not mention trans people and expressed some ambivalence about 1980s feminism, while Lisa, born in 1954, dismissed transphobia and the lesbian sex wars as 'ridiculous'.[133] However, discomposure and discomfort in discussions of feminism, 'queer' politics and trans

---

[130] Interview with Elsa (pseudonym), b. 1951, 29 January 2019.
[131] Gill-Peterson, *The Transgender Child*, 168-169.
[132] Interview with Carmen (pseudonym), b. 1949, 31 May 2019.
[133] Interview with Gwen (pseudonym), b. 1951, 9 October 2018; Interview with Lisa, b. 1954, 4 April 2019.

rights are similar to the 'difficulties in intergenerational communication' expressed by Jeska Rees in her analysis of the women's liberation movement, and her interviewees' uncertainty about which 'side' she was 'on'.[134] While my experiences were generally not as fraught as Rees's appear to have been, generational differences were a significant factor in all of the interviews. In some cases, this proved an advantage – interviewees were keen to inform me about the things they believed had changed over time. But at other times, debates in the 2010s were so contentious – such as in relation to the GRA – and involved so many references to the earlier period that generational differences produced uncertain and self-justificatory narratives. As Judith said in relation to lesbian and bisexual politics, 'I'm probably just a product of my time'.[135]

Generation

Interviewees' ages ranged from 47 to 70, with an average age of 59: the oldest (Carmen) was born in 1949 and the youngest (Aidan) was born in 1971.[136] Many interviewees therefore had clearer memories of the 1980s than the 1970s, although this varied – Ossian, born in 1954, had more detailed memories of the 1970s than Judith, even though she was born in the same year.[137] Age was also a factor in terms of the difference between myself and my interviewees. As a young woman, I was often seen by interviewees as representative of the younger generation, and at least three interviewees had children who were a similar age to me. This generational difference was often used to convey change over time, such as when Gwen asked: '[young people] do realise that in other ways their lives are completely – you know, have benefitted from the work that we did in the '70s, I think. Don't you think?'.[138] Generation was a key way in which the present moment affected how interviewees constructed their narratives – some were positive about the 'progress' that younger generations had made, while others were concerned about perceived

[134] Rees, "Are you a lesbian?", 177, 183-184.
[135] Interview with Judith (pseudonym), b. 1954, 11 October 2018.
[136] Interview with Carmen (pseudonym), b. 1949, 31 May 2019; Interview with Aidan, b. 1971, 22 June 2018.
[137] Interview with Ossian (pseudonym), b. 1954, 13 August 2018; Interview with Judith (pseudonym), b. 1954, 11 October 2018.
[138] Interview with Gwen (pseudonym), b. 1951, 9 October 2018.

historical ignorance.

Ossian told me that he thought the 'millenniums of today' were the heirs to GLF's political work, without the 'baggage' that had prevented GLF from being fully liberated.[139] This was exemplified for him by what he saw as a rejection of 'labels' by young people: 'I was reading recently, Tom Daley – he's only your age, isn't he […] he was saying that erm – you know, he doesn't now define himself as gay […] I think you've gone – a bit past that, your generation […] you're a bit more… advanced than that'.[140] This contrasts with some popular discussions around generation and identity labels, which sees young people's apparent rejection of identity labels as an example of historical ignorance. For example, Jack Halberstam criticises 'young gays and lesbians' who 'think of themselves as part of a "post-gender" world' and 'happily cast off' the idea of labels, 'even as those same identity categories represent the activist labours of previous generations that brought us to the brink of "liberation" in the first place'.[141] However, in this instance at least, someone from the older generation was himself praising the 'fluidity' and progressiveness of younger generations. Ossian was reinscribing generational boundaries in order to fit a narrative of progressive change over time, and perhaps as an effort to flatter me as a younger interviewer.

However, interviewees' discussions of generational difference were not always teleological or positive. Lisa saw young people's rejection of specific labels as censorious and over-sensitive. She gave the example of a friend who used the word 'dyke': 'and a group of younger women said "you can't use that word, it's offensive". It's like – she's been calling herself a dyke a lot longer than you've been around'.[142] The image of young people, especially women, as over-sensitive is a very common one, which Lisa implied came from youthful ignorance about the

[139] Interview with Ossian (pseudonym), b. 1954, 13 August 2018.
[140] Interview with Ossian (pseudonym), b. 1954, 13 August 2018.
[141] Jack Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2005), 19.
[142] Interview with Lisa, b. 1954, 4 April 2019.

politics of lesbian identity.[143]

Nigel had a slightly more complex assessment of generation and historical memory. He also thought that 'young people today' find coming out 'much easier', and said that 'it's almost like nowadays *young* people can be queer […] but older people can't'.[144] However, he also pointed out that the generation older than his – people aged 70 and older – were 'absolutely fine with it'.[145] His generation was therefore, he felt, an outlier, which he attributed to their experience of AIDS, in contrast to 'the younger generation', whom he felt 'don't even know what the AIDS crisis *was*'.[146] This was said with a sense of frustration that younger people did not engage with or understand their history, aligning with other discourses about generational divides amongst LGBTQ people such as this quote in *Vogue* magazine: 'The AIDS epidemic is ancient history to millennials. History to them is remembering who won *Ru Paul's Drag Race* season three! […] History doesn't record itself'.[147] However, this frustration was complicated by Nigel's argument that this apparent historical ignorance benefitted young people, in that it enabled them to be more comfortable and confident in their sexuality.

Alison also described a generational difference that she thought was characterised by ignorance from younger people – the idea that 'bi is binary'.[148] This was in the context of a conversation about her work as co-organiser of a bisexual group in Sheffield, which involved providing resources for a local secondary school's Pride Day and correcting 'misconceptions'.[149] Other conversations about generation with interviewees seemed to implicitly involve me as a representative of the 'younger generation', but this conversation was particularly personally

---

[143] For an example of discourse about young people being overly-censorious, see Lionel Shriver, "The young oppress their future selves", *The Spectator*, 21 October 2017, https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/the-young-oppress-their-future-selves; Interview with Lisa, b. 1954, 4 April 2019.
[144] Interview with Nigel, b. 1963, 12 January 2019.
[145] Interview with Nigel, b. 1963, 12 January 2019.
[146] Interview with Nigel, b. 1963, 12 January 2019.
[147] Stuart, quoted in Mark Holgate, "The AIDS Memorial on Instagram Has Become a Must-Read Remembrance of Those We've Lost", *Vogue*, 28 June 2018, https://www.vogue.com/article/the-aids-memorial-instagram#.
[148] Interview with Alison (pseudonym), b. 1967, 5 October 2018.
[149] Interview with Alison (pseudonym), b. 1967, 5 October 2018.

resonant, because I grew up in Sheffield and the school she was referring to was my old school, which did not have a Pride Day when I attended. In this instance, then, there was some distance between myself as an interviewer and the 'younger generation' that Alison was referring to, who were teenagers five to ten years younger than me. Alison therefore seemed to be implicitly grouping herself and myself together, as adults who understood the historical implications of the term 'bi'.

In contrast, some older interviewees saw me as so clearly representative of 'younger generations' that they sought confirmation from me about their sense of change over time. For example, Elsa asked whether I thought 'bisexuality… *exists* any more', and Gwen asked whether I thought the activism she had been involved in during the 1970s was 'worth it'.[150] In both of these instances, I faltered, and my answers were vague and noncommittal. This was partly because I was worried that my answers might prejudice their own recollections. But also, by asking me to account for my generational experience and current affairs, these interviewees explicitly reiterated generational boundaries and differences, while at the same time subverting the boundary and power dynamic between questioner and questioned.

Conclusion

The influence of the present moment was a significant and recurring presence in the oral histories that I conducted. This arose both in relation to current affairs – such as climate change or trans rights – and broader understandings of generational difference. Most interviewees did not present a uniform narrative of either change or continuity when linking between past and present. The internet was generally argued to have significantly changed society, although this was framed in both positive and negative ways – Aidan suggested that it provided access to communities he was previously unaware of, whereas Louise seemed more nostalgic for the

[150] Interview with Elsa (pseudonym), b. 1951, 29 January 2019; Interview with Gwen (pseudonym), b. 1951, 9 October 2018.

physical community she had been part of 'in the pre-internet days'.[151] On other issues, interviewees argued for a more cyclical, repetitive view of history – particularly in relation to Section 28, and environmental activism.

In relation to popular memories of the 1970s and 1980s, interviewees neither accepted these memories wholesale nor rejected them altogether. They generally focussed more on popular memories that related specifically to sexuality, rather than the more political and economic narratives of 'crisis' in the 1970s and 'neoliberalism' in the 1980s. Memories of the 1970s were often nostalgic and focussed on popular culture, especially music and fashion. Interviewees were more critical of the 1980s, particularly due to the AIDS epidemic and Section 28, although there were competing narratives at play about the impact of these.

Where interviewees' narratives diverged from 'popular' narratives they sometimes exhibited discomposure – for example, in Ossian's nostalgia for the 1970s coupled with his traumatic memories of violence in that period. However, Summerfield's argument that those whose memories differed from public accounts responded by 'seek[ing] to justify their deviation, or to press their memories into alternative frameworks, or to be able to express their stories only in fragmentary and deflected accounts' was generally not the case for my interviewees.[152] Even those whose memories diverged from popular narratives about the impact of Section 28, which was the subject of a great deal of public discussion at the time due to the anniversary in 2018, did not appear particularly discomposed by this. I would argue that this is because popular memories of the 1970s and 1980s are currently in flux, as evidenced by changing political approaches to the 1970s, from disavowal to reclamation. The numerous popular memories about these decades that are available in the late 2010s meant that my interviewees could select from different narratives to make numerous different points about their lives and memories.

---

[151] Interview with Aidan, b. 1971, 22 June 2018; Interview with Louise, b. 1966, 27 July 2018.
[152] Summerfield, "Culture and Composure", 93.

Conclusion

Bisexuals in the 1970s and 1980s were unable to articulate a coherent politics of identity. This was largely as a result of their exclusion from the dichotomous logics – gay or straight, political or sexual – established by gay and lesbian politics at the time.

This thesis demonstrates that the radical politics of gay liberation and lesbian feminism were founded on the exclusion, not just of heterosexuality, but of bisexuals and those attracted to multiple genders as well. This exclusion was not an aberration, but the foundation of their political theorising. Gay liberationists explained their radicalism, and sought alliances with other counter-cultural movements, on the basis of a dichotomy of gay and straight in which bisexuality was associated with 'straightness'. Lesbian feminists based their political identities on a rejection of the 'sexual'; bisexuality was associated with non-monogamy and SM, hyper-sexualised, and thus dismissed. This thesis therefore calls into question historical narratives of the 1970s and 1980s that emphasise the liberatory power of gay and lesbian activism, when the liberation of some was predicated on the exclusion and marginalisation of others.

While I question liberationist narratives of the 1970s and 1980s, it is clear that the period was a very particular moment in histories of sexuality and identity. At the beginning of the period, the binary distinction between gay and straight was just becoming socially dominant, and neither side of this binary had reckoned with the problem posed by bisexuality and multiple-gender-attraction.[1] Over the course of the 1970s, the development of lesbian feminism out of the gay liberation and women's movements occurred alongside a hardening of the approach towards bisexuality that cast it as a way for men to retain straight privilege while 'invading' gay and lesbian spaces. In the 1980s, independent bisexual organisations were founded and began trying to establish a bisexual politics, shortly before the AIDS epidemic took hold and stigmatised bisexuality and multiple-gender-attraction further as 'vectors' of the disease.

---

[1] Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 101.

Bisexuality was called into being in the 1970s and 1980s because the binary distinction between gay and straight was never able to encompass the range of potential attractions that people experienced throughout their lives. Attraction to multiple genders *posed* a political problem for the dichotomous logics of gay liberation and lesbian feminism, and bisexuality was born *out* of this problem – the fact that the binaries they relied upon were artificially imposed on a much greater range of behaviours. The history of bisexuality and attraction to multiple genders is thus a case study that can inform us about much broader histories – the interactions between attraction and identity in the late twentieth-century social, political and cultural moment.

Since that moment, there have been significant changes in gay and lesbian politics, and in their interactions with multiple-gender-attraction. Both gay liberation and lesbian feminism have become significantly less prominent forms of political organising since the 1990s, with the lesbian feminists of the 1970s and 1980s being almost entirely discredited by their successors.[2] Nominally greater 'acceptance' and legal reforms such as the equalisation of the age of consent, civil partnerships, and same-sex marriage have led to the incorporation of white, cisgender homosexuality into nationalist and capitalist politics.[3] The position of bisexuality and multiple-gender-attraction is ambivalent in relation to this. In many cases, the associations between bisexuality and promiscuity (and, relatedly, non-monogamy and infidelity) mean it is often still excluded from homonationalist politics. On the other hand, some bisexuals have gone to great lengths to reject these associations, through what Shiri Eisner describes as the 'myth-busting' approach:

> We are perfectly capable of being monogamous, and we are just as likely to cheat on our partners as anyone else […] Just because we like more than one gender doesn't mean we have sex indiscriminately. I mean, seriously, we have taste too![4]

In some cases, this re-branding of bisexuality has been sufficiently thorough to enable individuals who are attracted to multiple genders to be incorporated into mainstream politics. Conservative

[2] Jeffreys, *The Lesbian Revolution*, 171, 178.
[3] Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages*, 2.
[4] Eisner, *Bi*, 41.

MPs Daniel Kawczynski and Michael Fabricant both identify as bisexual, as does former Liberal Democrat MP Simon Hughes, who came out as bisexual in 2006 despite identifying himself as the 'straight choice' in the infamous 1983 Bermondsey by-election against Peter Tatchell.[5] While bisexuality and attraction to multiple genders have not become fully imbricated in nationalist and capitalist agendas in 2020, nor do they automatically guarantee exclusion from these agendas.

A key shift in the position of bisexuality and multiple-gender-attraction over time has been in relation to the 'gendering' of bisexuality. Whereas during the 1970s and much of the 1980s the default 'image' of bisexuality was a bisexual man – often older, middle-class and 'cowardly' – this has now changed to the extent that a Twitter hashtag campaign was developed to argue simply 'Bisexual Men Exist'.[6] In contrast to its companion hashtags #CelebrateBiWomen and #CelebrateBiNonbinary, #BisexualMenExist assumes that the mere existence of bisexual men needed to be asserted against systematic erasure and invisibility. The reduced cultural focus on bisexual men means that criticisms of bisexual misogyny or reinforcement of stereotypical gender roles are somewhat less widespread in the present day than they were in the 1970s and 1980s.

Instead, there is a greater focus on criticisms of bisexuality for maintaining a gender binary, on the basis that the prefix 'bi-' suggests attraction to only two genders. This argument is used today to assert that bisexuality is transphobic and, as Eisner argues, to again situate bisexuality 'as an oppressive identity that promotes hegemonic ideals'.[7] The term 'pansexual' was developed as a response to this concern, using the prefix 'pan-' ('all') to suggest a more inclusive approach beyond the gender binary. Bisexuality's relationship to pansexuality is a somewhat fraught debate within bisexual politics, calling into question as it does bisexuality's claims to

---

[5] Benjamin Cohen, "Simon Hughes: 'I'm bisexual'", *Pink News*, 26 January 2006, https://web.archive.org/web/20110926211228/http://www.pinknews.co.uk/news/articles/2005-355.html.
[6] Vaneet Mehta, "#BisexualMenExist", *rainbowandco.uk*, 7 August 2020, https://rainbowandco.uk/blogs/what-were-saying/bisexualmenexist-vaneet-mehta.
[7] Eisner, *Bi*, 54.

inclusivity and acceptance. Chryssy (b. 1962), who identified as pansexual, agreed with this critique of bisexuality, although she acknowledged that it was disputed: 'this is contested by people who claim bisexuality, erm, but I think bi – for me bisexuality would be a claim to two genders'.[8] However, other interviewees rejected it strongly and somewhat defensively, such as Alison (b. 1967): 'Bi is the historical word, and I'm not suddenly going to abandon it because other people have the wrong idea of what it actually means now. Language evolves. September isn't the seventh month. October isn't the eighth month [*laughs slightly*]. Bisexual doesn't mean two genders'.[9] Some events and organisations such as BiCon have begun to use terms such as 'bi+' and the 'bisexual umbrella' in an effort to incorporate both pansexuality and bisexuality, but this is an uneasy inclusion whose adoption has not yet become widespread.

Although discourses around bisexuality and multiple-gender-attraction have therefore changed in some ways, other tropes are more recurrent. Since the mid-1970s, when C.H.E. declared bisexuality to be 'positively fashionable' and 'enjoy[ing] a brief spell of trendiness during the last two or three years'; and *NIGRA News*, the newsletter of Northern Ireland's Gay Rights Association, declared 1975 to be the 'long hot summer of trendy (as in plastic and pretty) bisexuality', the apparent 'novelty' or 'trendiness' of bisexuality has been reiterated on numerous subsequent occasions.[10] The US magazine *Newsweek*, which itself featured an article about 'Bisexual Chic' in 1974, declared that bisexuality 'emerge[d]' as 'a new sexual identity' in 1995: 'Many college students, particularly women, talk about a new sexual "fluidity" on campus […] "We are in a bisexual moment"'.[11] The novelty of bisexuality was again reiterated in 2019, with the tongue-in-cheek renaming of the year as 'TwentyBiTeen'.[12] As discussed above, the gendering of

[8] Interview with Chryssy, b. 1962, 12 September 2018.
[9] Interview with Alison (pseudonym), b. 1967, 5 October 2018.
[10] Baker, "Bisexuality" 1974 discussion paper, 3; C.H.E., "Bisexuality" 1975 discussion paper, 12; John Lyttle, "Bi – Bi – Baby?", *NIGRA News*, August 1977, 13.
[11] Newsweek Staff, "Bisexuality: Not Gay. Not Straight. A New Sexual Identity Emerges", *Newsweek*, 16 July 1995, https://www.newsweek.com/bisexuality-184830.
[12] Sofia Barrett-Ibarria, "It's #TwentyBiTeen, girl-on-girl culture is peaking and it's about time", *The Guardian*, 28 June 2019, https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2019/jun/27/its-twentybiteen-girl-on-girl-culture-is-peaking-and-its-about-time.

bisexuality changed over time – C.H.E. and *NIGRA News* focussed primarily on male bisexual celebrities such as David Bowie and Marc Bolan, whereas TwentyBiTeen was linked to the 'peak' of 'girl-on-girl' culture and female celebrities such as Ariana Grande and Dua Lipa. However, the idea of bisexuality in general as particularly novel and modern has recurred with remarkable consistency every couple of decades. In *Histories of the Transgender Child,* Jules Gill-Peterson argues that repeated claims about the 'so-called newness and now-ness of trans life' are used to infantilise trans children, to invisibilise them and treat them as metaphors.[13] Although the emphasis on childhood and infantilisation is particular to debates around trans people – bisexuality is more often associated with 'college students' and young adults – the supposed 'newness' of bisexuality also involves treating it as a metaphor. In these discussions, the label of bisexuality is a metaphor used to signify fluidity, often promiscuity and – paradoxically – a disregard for labels. Older tropes of bisexuality as promiscuous and difficult to define are therefore employed even as its 'newness' is repeatedly proclaimed.

The repeated recurrence of debates and discussions about bisexuality and multiple-gender-attraction also highlights the difficulty that bisexuals have experienced in establishing a coherent identity politics. As Louise (b. 1966) said of the bisexual community she witnessed in the early 2000s: 'it felt very *new* […] like everything was *still* being chewed over'.[14] In this thesis, I have argued that the same debates around bisexuality keep being 'chewed over' because bisexual politics are ultimately based on an unstable foundation of vague commitments to diversity, which are unable to respond coherently to practical issues of community formation.

The relationship between bisexuality and multiple-gender-attraction on the one hand, and gay and lesbian politics on the other, was thus characterised by tension and exclusion on both sides. Paula C. Rust concludes her analysis of bisexual politics by positing two routes for the 'bisexual movement' in the 1990s and 2000s – either it will 'lose track of its focus on diversity'

---

[13] Gill-Peterson, *The Transgender Child*, 1, 8.
[14] Interview with Louise, b. 1966, 27 July 2018.

and allow itself to be 'co-opted into the gender system and constructed as a new sexual category', or it will 'keep sight of its current goals and remain a movement for sexual self-determination and liberation', which might prove to be 'the final revolution on the wheel' of sexual politics.[15] However, I would argue that Rust is overly optimistic about the potential for a 'movement' on the basis of an ambiguous politics of 'unity through diversity'. What seems more likely is that bisexual politics since the 1970s and 1980s has *continued* to be largely undefined, which has made it impossible to resolve questions of definition, categorisation and community. As a result, some interviewees – such as Ian (b. 1962) and Alison – were particularly enthusiastic about building a collective bisexual movement in the twenty-first century, but others – including a majority of my interviewees – did not recognise its existence at all.

The use of 'multiple-gender-attraction', and a focus on potential attraction rather than identity labels, has enabled me to move beyond dichotomous approaches to sexual politics and communities. People who were attracted to multiple genders were not uniformly 'co-opted into' binary systems of gender and identity, nor were they generally sexual 'revolutionaries' in pursuit of liberation. To return to the struggle by *Bi-Monthly* readers to find a single 'logo' to represent bisexuality, discussed in the Introduction, it was this resistance to easy categorisation that made multiple-gender-attraction threatening to gay liberationists and lesbian feminists in the 1970s and 1980s. It has also made it impossible for those attracted to multiple genders to form a coherent bisexual 'movement', even today.

[15] Rust, *Bisexuality and Lesbian Politics*, 259.

Bibliography

Interviews

Aidan Tagg – 22 June 2018.

Alison* – 5 October 2018.

Carmen* – 31 May 2019.

Chryssy Hunter – 12 September 2018.

Curtis* – 24 July 2018.

Dave Berry – 11 January 2020.

Elsa* – 29 January 2019.

Gwen* – 9 October 2018.

Ian Watters – 7 May 2019.

Judith* – 11 October 2018.

Kate Fearnley – 31 August 2019.

Lisa Power – 4 April 2019.

Louise Carolin – 27 July 2018.

Neil* – 26 September 2018.

Nigel Bailey – 12 January 2019.

Ossian* – 13 August 2018.

Vera* – 26 October and 8 November 2018.

Beryl Foster, interviewed by Margot Farnham for the Hall-Carpenter Archives (HCA) Oral History Project, C456/108 – 14 May and 17 May 1991.

Bette Bourne, interviewed by Emma Hindley for the HCA Oral History Project, C456/126 – 7 March 1994.

Christopher Spence, interviewed by Margot Farnham for the HCA Oral History Project, C456/95 – 26 September 1990.

Dave Godin, interviewed by Margot Farnham for the HCA Oral History Project, C456/88 – 10 June 1990.

David / Della McKenna, interviewed by Emma Hindley for the HCA Oral History Project, C456/125 – 27 January 1994.

---

* Pseudonyms

Diane Langford, interviewed by Margot Farnham for the HCA Oral History Project, C456/107 – 10 May 1991.

Ellen Noor, interviewed by an unknown interviewer for the HCA Oral History Project, C456/46 – 1985.

Gilli Salvat, interviewed by Allegra Damji for the HCA Oral History Project, C456/40 – 29 June 1986.

Gillian Butler, interviewed by Margot Farnham for the HCA Oral History Project, C456/106 – 9 May 1991.

Helen Lowe, interviewed by Margot Farnham for the HCA Oral History Project, C456/94 – 18 March and 19 March 1991.

Jackie Forster, interviewed by Margot Farnham for the HCA Oral History Project, C456/87 – 30 May, 14 June and 2 August 1990.

Liz Kelly, interviewed by Margot Farnham for the HCA Oral History Project, C456/105 – 16 March 1991.

Liz Naylor, interviewed by Margot Farnham for the HCA Oral History Project, C456/43 – 11 March 1986.

Sophie Laws, interviewed by Margot Farnham for the HCA Oral History Project, C456/81 – 8 March, 8 June and 6 October 1990.

Sue King, interviewed by Margot Farnham for the HCA Oral History Project, C456/35 – 5 December 1985.

Zahid Dar, interviewed by William Todd for the HCA Oral History Project, C456/19 – October 1985.

Archives

Hall-Carpenter Archives, London School of Economics

Albany Trust General Correspondence – HCA/ALBANY TRUST/7.

Rupert Beach Papers – HCA/BEACH.

- *GLF Manifestos and Statements of Principles – HCA/BEACH/1.*
- *Come Together – HCA/BEACH/5.*

Campaign for Homosexual Equality Papers – HCA/CHE.

- *Annual Reports – HCA/CHE/1.*
- *National Council Papers – HCA/CHE/3.*
- *Newsletters – HCA/CHE/4.*
- *Local Groups – HCA/CHE/7.*
- *Conference Papers – HCA/CHE/8.*

- *Reports – HCA/CHE/10.*
- *Other Organisations – HCA/CHE/12.*
- *General Papers HCA/CHE/13.*

John Chesterman Papers – HCA/CHESTERMAN/7.

Ephemera – HCA/EPHEMERA.

- *Birmingham Gay Liberation Front – HCA/EPHEMERA/43.*

Gay Liberation Front Papers – HCA/GLF.

- *1971 – 1976 Papers – HCA/GLF/3.*
- *South London Gay Liberation Front – HCA/GLF/8.*
- *Leeds and Bradford Gay Liberation Front – HCA/GLF/11.*
- *Gay Liberation Front and Various Other Publications – HCA/GLF/16.*

Women's Library, London School of Economics

Mary McIntosh Papers – MCINTOSH.

- *Gay Liberation Movement Papers – MCINTOSH/7.*
- *2012 Deposit – MCINTOSH/10.*

The British Library Sound Archive, London

Hall-Carpenter Archives Oral History Archive, C456.

Bishopsgate Archives, London

Feminist Library Ephemera Collection – FL/EPH/B, FL/EPH/X.

Lesbian and Gay Newsmedia Archive Ephemera – LAGNA/EPH/489.

Switchboard Press Cuttings – SB/6/4.

Periodicals

Anti-Sexist Men's Newsletter (1981)

Bi-Monthly (1984 – 1989)

Birmingham Gay Liberation Front's Newsletter (1973/4)

C.H.E. Bulletin (1972 – 1976)

C.H.E. Broadsheet (1978 – 1979)

Come Together (1971 – 1973)

Esquire (1969)

Gay Flashes (1972)

Gay Left (1975)

Gay News (1972 – 1983)

The New Gay News (1983 – 1985)

Gay Times (1984 – 1990)

- Known as *HIM / Gay Times* May 1984 – June 1985.

Gladrag (1976 – 1977)

HIM Monthly (1983 – 1984)

- Also known as *HIM Gay Reporter,* took over *Gay Times* in May 1984.

Linchpin (1974)

Lunch (1972)

Melody Maker (1972)

NIGRA News (1977)

OUT (1976)

Rolling Stone (1983)

Printed Primary Sources

Hall-Carpenter Archives Gay Men's Oral History Project. *Walking After Midnight: Gay Men's Life Stories.* London: Routledge, 1989.

Hall-Carpenter Archives Lesbian Oral History Project. *Inventing Ourselves: Lesbian Life Stories.* London: Routledge, 1989.

Kenyon, Barrie and Christopher Bowden-Smith, "C.H.E. Activists", *C.H.E. Annual Report 1975* (Manchester: C.H.E. Executive, 1975).

Leeds Revolutionary Feminists. *Love Your Enemy? The debate between heterosexual feminism and political lesbianism.* London: Onlywomen Press, 1981.

MacInnes, Colin. *Loving Them Both: A Study of Bisexuality and Bisexuals.* London: Martin Brian & O'Keeffe Limited, 1973.

Reuben, David. *Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Sex – But Were Afraid to Ask.* London: W.H. Allen, 1971.

Stanley, Liz. "Male Needs: The Problems and Problems of Working with Gay Men", in *On The Problem of Men: Two Feminist Conferences,* edited by Scarlet Friedman and Elizabeth Sarah, 190-212. London: Women's Press, 1982.

Weeks, Jeffrey. *Coming Out: Homosexual Politics in Britain, from the Nineteenth Century to the Present.* London: Quartet Books, 1977.

Wolff, Charlotte. *Bisexuality: A Study*. London: Quartet Books, 1977.

Unpublished Theses

Lindley, Ruth. "'The Personal Is Political Is Spiritual': Feminism and Religion in Modern Britain." PhD Thesis. University of Birmingham, 2019.

Online Sources

"What the 1970s meant to you", *BBC News Magazine*, 7 June 2007, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/magazine/6729701.stm.

Barrett-Ibarria, Sofia. "It's #TwentyBiTeen, girl-on-girl culture is peaking and it's about time", *The Guardian*, 28 June 2019, https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2019/jun/27/its-twentybiteen-girl-on-girl-culture-is-peaking-and-its-about-time.

Bell, Taylor. "How David Bowie Made It OK to Not Be a Straight Man", *attn:,* 11 January 2016, https://archive.attn.com/stories/5106/how-david-bowie-pioneered-gender-fluidity.

Cameron, David. "David Cameron's New Year message", *Conservative Home*, 30 December 2008, https://conservativehome.blogs.com/torydiary/2008/12/david-camerons.html.

Cohen, Benjamin. "Simon Hughes: 'I'm bisexual'", *Pink News*, 26 January 2006, https://web.archive.org/web/20110926211228/http://www.pinknews.co.uk/news/articles/2005-355.html.

Dave, Shivani and Michael Baggs. "National Coming Out Day: Why I can't come out at home." *BBC Newsbeat*, 11 Oct 2018, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/newsbeat-45813239.

Dhesi, Wayne. "National Coming Out Day 2018." *Stonewall.org.uk*, 10 Oct 2018, https://www.stonewall.org.uk/our-work/blog/national-coming-out-day-2018.

Ferguson, McKenna. "Why *OITNB* refuses to say the word 'Bisexual'", *Pride.com*, 30 June 2016, https://www.pride.com/oitnb/2016/6/30/why-oitnb-refuses-say-word-bisexual.

Ford, Zack. "David Bowie's Impact on Gender and Sexuality is Everywhere", *thinkprogress.org,* 11 January 2016, https://thinkprogress.org/david-bowies-impact-on-gender-and-sexuality-is-everywhere-b046c393174b/.

Godfrey, Chris. "Section 28 protestors 30 years on: 'We were arrested and put in a cell up by Big Ben'", *The Guardian*, 27 March 2018, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/mar/27/section-28-protesters-30-years-on-we-were-arrested-and-put-in-a-cell-up-by-big-ben.

Hassall, Richard. "Labour leadership: better back to the 1970s with Jeremy Corbyn than 1870s with Tories", *The Observer*, 30 August 2015, https://www.theguardian.com/theobserver/2015/aug/30/the-big-issue-labour-leadership.

Here and Now: Gay Black Group, Central Independent Television, 1983. *BFI Player*, https://player.bfi.org.uk/free/film/watch-gay-black-group-1983-online.

Holgate, Mark. "The AIDS Memorial on Instagram Has Become a Must-Read Remembrance of

Those We've Lost", *Vogue*, 28 June 2018, https://www.vogue.com/article/the-aids-memorial-instagram#.

Human Rights Campaign. "Celebrate National Coming Out Day with HRC!" *HRC.org*, 11 Oct 2018, https://www.hrc.org/resources/national-coming-out-day.

Hunt, Ruth. "30 years ago, the conversations we had about Section 28 were the same as the ones we have about trans rights today", *The Independent*, 24 May 2018, https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/section-28-school-sexuality-education-gay-lgbt-trans-rights-thatcher-a8366751.html.

It Gets Better Project. "About Our Global Movement." *itgetsbetter.org,* 2010 – 2018, https://itgetsbetter.org/about/.

It Gets Better Project. "Our Vision / Mission / People." *itgetsbetter.org,* 2010 – 2018, https://itgetsbetter.org/initiatives/mission-vision-people/.

Jones, Owen. "Anti-trans zealots, know this: history will judge you", *The Guardian*, 15 December 2017, https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/dec/15/trans-backlash-anti-gay-zealotry-section-28-homophobia.

- "Pride isn't a party, it's a time for queer people to fight again for their rights", *The Guardian*, 12 June 2019, https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/jun/12/lgbtq-rights-danger-pride-fight-back-homophobic-attacks.

K., Nila, Jacq and J. "BiCon lets down People of Colour. Again…" *Bi's of Colour* blog, 15 June 2020, https://bisofcolour.home.blog/2020/06/15/bicon-lets-down-people-of-colour-again/.

Lewis, Philip. "The Complicated Sexual History of David Bowie", *mic.com*, 12 January 2016, https://www.mic.com/articles/132399/the-complicated-sexual-history-of-david-bowie.

McDonagh, Patrick James. "Queering Northern Ireland during the 'Troubles'", *Writing The Troubles* blog, 18 February 2019, https://writingthetroublesweb.wordpress.com/2019/02/18/queering-the-troubles/.

Mehta, Vaneet. "#BisexualMenExist", *rainbowandco.uk*, 7 August 2020, https://rainbowandco.uk/blogs/what-were-saying/bisexualmenexist-vaneet-mehta.

Mind, "Stand Bi Me: Information and guidance on how to support bisexual people", *mind.*org, 2016, https://www.mind.org.uk/media/18833979/stand-bi-me.pdf.

Newark, Tim. "Jeremy Corbyn's mad plan would take Britain back to the 1970s, writes Tim Newark", *The Express*, 12 May 2017, https://www.express.co.uk/comment/expresscomment/803565/jeremy-corbyn-general-election-2017-plan-take-britain-1970s-labour-manifesto-tim-newark.

Newsweek Staff. "Bisexuality: Not Gay. Not Straight. A New Sexual Identity Emerges", *Newsweek*, 16 July 1995, https://www.newsweek.com/bisexuality-184830.

Oakley, Lewis. "Is this the reason why bisexual people have yet to form a community?" *Gay Star News*, 2 May 2019, https://www.gaystarnews.com/article/is-this-the-reason-why-

bisexual-people-have-yet-to-form-a-community/#gs.ejp75j.

Pulley, Anna. "Why won't *Orange is the New Black* acknowledge that bisexuals exist?", *Buzzfeed.com*, 14 July 2015, https://www.buzzfeed.com/annapulley/bisexual-erasure-on-television.

Reade, Brian. "I'd rather be dragged back to Jeremy Corbyn's 1970s than Theresa May's 1950s", *The Mirror*, 12 May 2017, https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/politics/id-dragged-back-back-jeremy-10409492.

Shearing, Lois. "There definitely is a bi community – and it's changing lives." *Medium.com*, 4 May 2019, https://medium.com/@lois.shearing/there-definitely-is-a-bi-community-and-its-changing-lives-23324d415cdd.

Shriver, Lionel. "The young oppress their future selves", *The Spectator*, 21 October 2017, https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/the-young-oppress-their-future-selves.

Swinford, Steven. "Ed Miliband wants to 'return Britain to 1970s class warfare'", *The Telegraph*, 20 April 2015, https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/politics/ed-miliband/11550033/Ed-Miliband-wants-to-return-Britain-to-1970s-class-warfare.html.

Teeman, Tim. "How David Bowie Sexually Liberated Us All", *The Daily Beast,* 11 January 2016, https://www.thedailybeast.com/how-david-bowie-sexually-liberated-us-all.

Walkey, A.J.."Bi-erasure in *Orange is the New Black*", *The Huffington Post*, 23 August 2013, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/orange-is-the-new-black-bisexuality_b_3799037.

Winnett, Robert. "Gordon Brown tells trade unions 'no return to the 1970s'", *The Telegraph*, 6 July 2008, https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/politics/labour/2258770/Gordon-Brown-tells-trade-unions-no-return-to-1970s.html.

Secondary Sources

Abrams, Lynn. *Oral History Theory*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2010.

Angelides, Stephen. *A History of Bisexuality*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2001.

Bear, Clare. "BAD (Bisexuals Affirming Diversity): Bistory", in *Bisexual Horizons: Politics, Histories, Lives,* edited by The Off Pink Collective, 298 – 302. London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1996.

Bi Academic Intervention, ed. *The Bisexual Imaginary: Representation, Identity and Desire.* London: Cassell, 1997.

Black, Lawrence and Hugh Pemberton, "Introduction: The Benighted Decade", in *Reassessing 1970s Britain,* edited by Lawrence Black, Hugh Pemberton and Pat Thane, 1-24. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013.

Brooke, Stephen. *Sexual Politics: Sexuality, Family Planning and the British Left from the 1880s to the Present Day.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.

- "Space, Emotions and the Everyday: The Affective Ecology of 1980s London." *Twentieth Century British History* 28, no. 1 (2017): 110-142.

Brumbaugh-Johnson, Stacey M. and Kathleen E. Hull. "Coming Out as Transgender: Navigating the Social Implications of Transgender Identity." *Journal of Homosexuality* 66, no. 8 (2019): 1148-1177.

Boyd, Nan Alamilla. "Who is the subject? Queer Theory Meets Oral History", *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 17, no. 2 (May 2008): 177-189.

Boyd, Nan Alamilla, and Horacio N. Roque Ramírez, eds, *Bodies of Evidence: The Practice of Queer Oral History*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.

Cass, Vivienne C. "Homosexual Identity Formation: A Theoretical Model", *Journal of Homosexuality* 4, no. 3 (1979): 219 – 235.

Chauncey, George. *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890 – 1940.* New York, NY: Basic Books, 1994.

Cohen, Deborah. *Family Secrets: The Things We Tried to Hide*. London: Penguin Books, 2014

Collins, Marcus. *Modern Love: An Intimate History of Men and Women in Twentieth-Century Britain.* London: Atlantic Books, 2003.

Cook, Matt. *Queer Domesticities: Homosexuality and Home Life in Twentieth-Century London.* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.

- "'Archives of Feeling': The AIDS Crisis in Britain 1987." *History Workshop Journal* 83, no. 1 (2017): 51-78.

Cvetkovich, Ann. *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality and Lesbian Public Cultures.* Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003.

D'Augelli, Anthony R. "Identity Development and Sexual Orientation: Toward a model of lesbian, gay and bisexual development". In *Human Diversity: Perspectives on people in context*, edited by E. J. Trickett, R. J. Watts and D. Birman, 326-327. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1994.

Delap, Lucy. "Feminist Bookshops, Reading Cultures and the Women's Liberation Movement in Great Britain, c. 1974 – 2000." *History Workshop Journal* 81 (2016): 171-196.

- "Feminism, Masculinities and Emotional Politics in Late Twentieth Century Britain." *Cultural and Social History* (2018): 1-23.

Doan, Laura. *Disturbing Practices: History, Memory and Women's Experience of Modern War*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2013.

- "Marie Stopes's Wonderful Rhythm Charts: Normalising the Natural", *Journal of the History of Ideas* 78, no. 4 (October 2017): 595-620.

Donaldson, Stephen. "The Bisexual Movement's Beginnings in the 70s: A Personal Retrospective", in *Bisexual Politics: Theories, Queries and Visions*, edited by Naomi Tucker, 2nd edition, 31-45. New York, NY: Routledge, 2013.

Duberman, Martin. *Stonewall.* New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1993.

Dunn, Ian. "Scotland: against the odds", in *Radical Records: Thirty Years of Lesbian and Gay History, 1957 – 1987*, edited by Cant, Bob and Susan Hemmings, 22-26. London: Routledge, 1988.

Dworkin, Andrea. “Pornography and Male Supremacy.” In: *Letters from a War Zone: Writings 1976 – 1989*. New York, NY: Lawrence Hill Books, 1993.

Eisner, Shiri. *Bi: Notes for a Bisexual Revolution*. Berkeley, CA: Seal Press, 2013.

Ellis, Nadia. “Black Migrants, White Queers and the Archive of Inclusion in Postwar London”, *Interventions* 17, no. 6 (2015): 893 – 915.

Fisher, Kate. *Birth Control, Sex and Marriage in Britain, 1918-60.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.

Flanders, Corey E. “Introduction to the Special Issue: Under the Bisexual Umbrella: Diversity of Identity and Experience”, *Journal of Bisexuality* 17, no. 1 (2017): 1-6.

Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality Volume 1: An Introduction*. Translated by Robert Hurley. London: Penguin Books, 1998.

Fox, Anne. “Developing a Bisexual Identity”, in *Bi Any Other Name: Bisexual People Speak Out,* edited by Loraine Hutchins and Lani Kaahumanu, 29-36. Los Angeles, CA: Alyson Books, 1991.

Galupo, M. Paz. “Plurisexual Identity Labels and the Marking of Bisexual Desire”, in *Bisexuality: Theories, Research, and Recommendations for the Invisible Sexuality*, edited by Swan, D. Joye and Shani Habibi, 61-76. Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2018.

Gill-Peterson, Jules. *Histories of the Transgender Child.* Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2018.

Glen, Patrick. “‘Oh You Pretty Thing!’: How David Bowie ‘Unlocked Everybody’s Inner Queen’ in spite of the music press”, *Contemporary British History* 31, no. 3 (2017): 407-429.

Gorelick, Sherry. “Contradictions of Feminist Methodology”, *Gender & Society* 5, no. 4 (1991): 349-477.

Green, Anna. “Individual Remembering and ‘Collective Memory’: Theoretical Presuppositions and Contemporary Debates”, *Oral History* 32, no. 2 (2004): 35-44.

Halberstam, Jack. *In a Queer Time and Place.* New York, NY: New York University Press, 2005.

Hall, Donald E. “BI-ntroduction II”, in *RePresenting Bisexualities: Subjects and Cultures of Fluid Desire*, edited by Donald E. Hall and Maria Pramaggiore. New York, NY: New York University Press, 1996.

Harper, Amney J. and Renae Swanson. “Nonsequential Task Model of Bi/Pan/Polysexual Identity Development”, *Journal of Bisexuality* 19, no. 3 (2019): 337-360.

Harrad, Kate, ed. *Purple Prose: Bisexuality in Britain.* Portland, OR: Thorntree Press, 2016.

Hebdige, Dick. *Subculture: The Meaning of* Style, 3rd edition. London: Routledge, 2002.

Hemmings, Clare. *Bisexual Spaces: A Geography of Sexuality and Gender*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2002.

- “A Feminist Methodology of the Personal: Bisexual Experience and Feminist Post-Structuralist Epistemology”, in *Feminist Methodology*, edited by Channa Subhandra,

295-318. New Delhi: Cosmo, 2006.

Hilton, Matthew, Chris Moores and Florence Sutcliffe-Braithwaite. "New Times Revisited: Britain in the 1980s", *Contemporary British History* 31, no. 2 (2017): 145-165.

Houlbrook, Matt. *Queer London: Perils and Pleasures in the Sexual Metropolis, 1918 – 1957.* Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2005.

- "Thinking Queer: The Social and the Sexual in Interwar Britain". In *British Queer History: New Approaches and Perspectives*, edited by Brian Lewis, 134-159. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013.

Hughes, Celia. *Young Lives on the Left: Sixties Activism and the Liberation of the Self.* Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015.

Hutchins, Loraine and Lani Kaahumanu, eds, *Bi Any Other Name: Bisexual People Speak Out.* Los Angeles, CA: Alyson Books, 1991.

Jackson, Julian. *Living in Arcadia: Homosexuality, Politics and Morality in France from the Liberation to AIDS.* Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 2009.

Jeffreys, Sheila. "Bisexual Politics: A Superior Form of Feminism?" *Women's Studies International Forum* 22, no. 3 (1999): 273-285.

- *The Lesbian Revolution: Lesbian Feminism in the UK, 1970 – 1990.* Abingdon: Routledge, 2018.

Jordan, June. "A New Politics of Sexuality", in *Bisexual Horizons: Politics, Histories, Lives,* edited by The Off Pink Collective, 11-15. London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1996.

Jorm, Anthony F. et al, "Sexual orientation and mental health: results from a community survey of young and middle-aged adults", *British Journal of Psychiatry* 180 (2002): 423 – 427.

Klein, Kate, Alix Holtby, Katie Cook and Robb Travers. "Complicating the Coming Out Narrative: Becoming Oneself in a Heterosexist and Cissexist World." Journal of Homosexuality 62, no. 3 (2015): 297-326.

Kunzel, Regina. *Criminal Intimacy: Prison and the Uneven History of Modern American Sexuality.* Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2008.

Langhamer, Claire. *The English in Love: The Intimate Story of an Emotional Revolution.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.

Lewis, Brian. "Introduction: British Queer History". In *British Queer History: New Approaches and Perspectives*, edited by Brian Lewis, 1-16. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013.

MacDowall, Lachlan. "Historicising Contemporary Bisexuality", *Journal of Bisexuality* 9, no. 1 (2009): 3-15.

Malatino, Hilary. *Queer Embodiment: Monstrosity, Medical Violence, and Intersex Experience.* Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2019.

Maliepaard, Emil. "Disclosing Bisexuality or Coming Out? Two Different Realities for Bisexual People in the Netherlands", *Journal of Bisexuality* 18, no. 2 (2018): 145-167.

Manning, Jimmie. "Communicating Sexual Identities: A Typology of Coming Out", *Sexuality & Culture* 19 (2015): 122-138.

Marcus, Sharon. *Between Women: Friendship, Desire and Marriage in Victorian England*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007.

McLean, Kirsten. "Hiding in the Closet? Bisexuals, coming out and the disclosure imperative", *Journal of Sociology* 43, no. 2 (2007): 151-166.

Meek, Jeffrey. *Queer Voices in Post-War Scotland: Male Homosexuality, Religion and Society.* London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.

Mills, Helena. "Using the personal to critique the popular: women's memories of 1960s youth", *Contemporary British History* 30, no. 4 (2016): 463-483.

Minto, David. "Mr Grey goes to Washington: The Homophile Internationalism of Britain's Homosexual Law Reform Society". In *British Queer History: New Approaches and Perspectives*, edited by Brian Lewis, 219-243. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013.

Moores, Chris. *Civil Liberties and Human Rights in Twentieth-Century Britain.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017.

Moran, Joe. "'Stand Up and Be Counted': Hughie Green, the 1970s, and Popular Memory", *History Workshop Journal* 70, no. 1 (2010): 172-198.

Murphy, Kevin P., Jennifer L. Pierce and Jason Ruiz. "What Makes Queer Oral History Different", *Oral History Review* 43, no. 1 (2016): 1-24.

Ochs, Robyn. "What's in a Name? Why Women Embrace or Resist Bisexual Identity". In *Becoming Visible: Counseling Bisexuals Across the Lifespan*, edited by Beth A. Firestein, 72-86. New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2007.

Patai, Daphne. "US Academics and Third World Women: Is Ethical Research Possible?", in *Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History*, ed. Sherna Berger Gluck and Daphne Patai, 137-153. New York, NY: Routledge, 1991.

Phillips, Charlie, and Mike Phillips. *Notting Hill in the Sixties.* London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1991.

Plummer, Ken. *Telling Sexual Stories: Power, Change and Social Worlds*. London: Routledge, 1995.

Prabhudas, Yasmin. "Bisexuals and People of Mixed Race: Arbiters of Change", in *Bisexual Horizons: Politics, Histories, Lives,* edited by The Off Pink Collective, 30-31. London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1996.

Popular Memory Group. *What do we mean by Popular Memory?* Birmingham: Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, 1982.

Power, Lisa. *No Bath But Plenty of Bubbles: An Oral History of the Gay Liberation Front 1970 – 1973.* London: Cassell, 1995.

- "Forbidden Fruit", in *Anti-Gay*, edited by Mark Simpson, 55-65. London: Freedom Editions, 1996.

Puar, Jasbir. *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*, 2nd edition. Durham, NC:

Duke University Press, 2017.

Reba Weise, Elizabeth. "The Bisexual Community: Viable Reality or Revolutionary Pipe Dream?" in *Bisexual Horizons: Politics, Histories, Lives,* edited by The Off Pink Collective, 303-313. London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1996.

Rees, Jeska. "'Are you a lesbian?': Challenges in Recording and Analysing the Women's Liberation Movement in England", *History Workshop Journal* 69, no. 1 (2010): 177-187.

Robinson, Lucy. *Gay Men and the Left in Post-War Britain: How the Personal Got Political.* Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007.

Robinson Rhodes, Martha. "Bisexuality, Multiple-Gender-Attraction, and Gay Liberation Politics in the 1970s", *Twentieth Century British History* (2020): 1-24.

Roper, Michael, and John Tosh. *Manful Assertions: Masculinities in Britain since 1800.* London: Routledge, 1991.

Roper, Michael. "Analysing the Analysed: Transference and Counter-Transference in the Oral History Encounter", *Oral History*, 31, 2 (2003): 20-32.

Rust, Paula C. *Bisexuality and the Challenge to Lesbian Politics: Sex, Loyalty and Revolution*. New York, NY: New York University Press, 1995.

Scott, Simon. "Politically Bi." In *Bisexual Horizons: Politics, Histories, Lives,* edited by The Off Pink Collective, 236 – 239. London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1996.

Scott-Presland, Peter. *Amiable Warriors: A History of the Campaign for Homosexual Equality and its Times Volume 1: A Space to Breathe, 1954 – 1974.* London: Paradise Press, 2015.

Sedwick, Eve Kosofsky. *Epistemology of the Closet*, 2nd edition. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2008.

Stacey, Judith. Can There Be A Feminist Ethnography?", *Women's Studies International Forum* 11, no. 1 (1988): 21-27.

Stokes, Joseph P., Robin L. Miller and Rhonda Mundhenk. "Toward an understanding of behaviourally bisexual men: The influence of context and culture", *The Canadian Journal of Human Sexuality* 7, no. 2 (1998): 101-113.

Storr, Merl. "The Sexual Reproduction of 'Race': Bisexuality, History and Racialisation". In *The Bisexual Imaginary: Representation, Identity and Desire*, edited by Bi Academic Intervention, 73-86. London: Cassell, 1997.

- ed. *Bisexuality: A Critical Reader*. London: Routledge, 1999.

Summerfield, Penny. *Reconstructing Women's Wartime Lives: Discourse and Subjectivity in Oral Histories of the Second World War.* Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998

- "Culture and Composure: Creating Narratives of the Gendered Self in Oral History Interviews", *Cultural and Social History* 1, no. 1 (2004): 65-93.

Szeman, Imre and Susie O'Brien. *Popular Culture: A User's Guide, International Edition*, 4th edition. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2017.

The Off Pink Collective, ed. *Bisexual Horizons: Politics, Histories, Lives.* London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1996.

- "Introduction", in *Bisexual Horizons: Politics, Histories, Lives,* edited by The Off Pink Collective, 1-9. London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1996.

Thompson, Alistair, Michael Frisch and Paula Hamilton. "The Memory and History Debates: Some International Perspectives", *Oral History* 22, no. 2 (1994): 33-43.

Tooth Murphy, Amy. "'I conformed, I got married. It seemed like a good idea at the time': Domesticity in postwar lesbian oral history". In *British Queer History: New Approaches and Perspectives*, edited by Brian Lewis, 165-187. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013.

Troiden, Richard R. "The Formation of Homosexual Identities", *Journal of Homosexuality* 17, no. 1-2 (1989): 43-73.

Tucker, Naomi, ed. *Bisexual Politics: Theories, Queries and Visions*, 2nd edition. New York, NY: Routledge, 2013.

Udis-Keller, Amanda. "Identity / Politics: A History of the Bisexual Movement", in *Bisexual Politics: Theories, Queries and Visions*, edited by Naomi Tucker, 2nd edition, 17-30. New York, NY: Routledge, 2013.

Wall, Christine. "Sisterhood and Squatting in the 1970s: Feminism, Housing and Urban Change in Hackney", *History Workshop Journal* 83, no. 1 (2017): 79-97.

Wandrei, Karin E. "'Sleeping with the Enemy': Non-monogamy and 1970s lesbian-feminists", *Sexualities* 22, no. 4 (2019): 489-506.

Waters, Chris. "The Homosexual as a Social Being in Britain". In *British Queer History: New Approaches and Perspectives*, edited by Brian Lewis, 188-218. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013.