

HIDING IN PLAIN SIGHT: AN EXAMINATION OF THE SEXUAL AND RELIGIOUS LIVES OF
BISEXUAL 18 – 25 YEAR OLDS WITHIN THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND, THROUGH CRITICAL
DOCUMENT ANALYSIS OF CHURCH OF ENGLAND POLICIES AND REFLECTIVE PARTICIPANT
INTERVIEWS

by

HARRIET OLIVIA GRACE HEATH

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

Department of Theology and Religion
School of Philosophy, Theology and Religion
College of Arts and Law
University of Birmingham
May 2024

93,549 words

UNIVERSITY OF
BIRMINGHAM

University of Birmingham Research Archive

e-theses repository

This unpublished thesis/dissertation is copyright of the author and/or third parties. The intellectual property rights of the author or third parties in respect of this work are as defined by The Copyright Designs and Patents Act 1988 or as modified by any successor legislation.

Any use made of information contained in this thesis/dissertation must be in accordance with that legislation and must be properly acknowledged. Further distribution or reproduction in any format is prohibited without the permission of the copyright holder.

Abstract

The relationship between bisexuality and Christianity presents a nuanced and frequently overlooked dynamic; the lived experiences of bisexual Christians are often skewed by societal misconceptions and are exacerbated by oversimplified views of sexuality. Whilst there is a growing body of research exploring the unique dynamics between bisexuality and Christianity that strives to explore the lives of those within this community, there remains a significant gap in understanding as to whether the language used in Christian policies and publications accurately reflects the realities faced by bisexual Christians. This research endeavour aims to address this gap by employing a triangulation approach of qualitative semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and a publications-focused reading task, to support understanding of lived experience. Through engaging with both the bisexual Christian community, and academics and clergy involved in the creation of Church policies and publications, alongside an in-depth analysis of particular Church publications, both through literature-based analysis and the implementation of a reading task, it is anticipated that the findings will reveal the discrepancy between the language used in Church of England policy, and the lived experiences of bisexual individuals within Church communities.

It is hoped that this research will, whilst not presenting a definitive statement, lend support to the view that current bisexual discourse within the Church of England is outdated, and lacks an accurate representation of the contemporary experiences of this demographic. Through an analysis of the lived experience data, alongside critical discussion of the language that exists within Church policy, it is hoped that this research will shed a small yet powerful insight into feelings of wariness and a lack of affirmation, coupled with stereotypical misunderstandings and the privileges and downfalls of (in)visibility within the Church of England. Additionally, the study aims to shed light on the unique struggles of guilt and privilege encountered by bisexual individuals in relation to marriage discourse, where their voices are often marginalised and unheard. It is hoped that this study will provide a stronger voice for bisexual Christians within their communities, will offer detailed insights into the unique challenges that bisexuals face, and will ultimately encourage more effective change-making in policy and documentation, by focusing on the importance of lived experiences. This study wishes to narrow the disparity that exists between what is publicly ‘thought’, and what privately ‘is’ for the bisexual community within the Church of England.

Acknowledgements

When I consider the way that my life has changed over the course of this thesis, there are probably nearly a thousand people I could thank (or perhaps this is a little exaggerated, as I'm not sure I know that many people). Through the course of moving, different jobs, friends and family coming and going, there are a few steadfast ships that have sailed steadily upon the rather tumultuous ocean that is this PhD process.

Firstly, to my husband, **Owain**. Your support has been unwavering and true ever since we first met, three weeks before beginning my Master's programme. Your ability to question and look at my research in ways I have never considered has been an incredible help and has kept things fresh when this process has felt stale. I'm always thankful, and feel incredibly loved, when I hear the way you tell friends and colleagues about my study – I honestly feel at this point that you can explain my PhD better than I can! You make me so proud, and I hope I make you proud too. I hope you're particularly proud that it's your surname ending up on the first page of this mammoth document. Endlessly, and always, thank you for your love and support. I wouldn't be where I am without you.

To my parents, **Kevin** and **Michele**. Hasn't it been a wild ride? Always the hard worker but never the best, not in my wildest dreams would I ever have imagined myself coming to the end of the 'pinnacle' of academia, a PhD programme. Well, perhaps I should have got my eyes tested sooner than I did, because you have always seen this spark and passion within me, and I cannot thank you enough for nurturing my inquisitive spirit. Through all the wild academic adventures I have faced within my lifetime, you have both held my hand, encouraged me to raise my head high, and devotedly pushed me on, even when I felt like I wasn't getting anywhere. I am truly lucky to have you as my parents, and I love you both so much – for you as yourselves, and for every opportunity you have given me.

To my fantastic supervisors, **Karen** and **Sarah**. In the face of changing supervision so early in my programme, you have both taken me under your wing and nurtured my creativity, my madness, and my lack of ability to do things in only one colour on a Word document. Your support and energy have been unwavering, even among the ten thousand other things that you both do. My thesis has changed and developed and grown over the last four years and is so different to what I originally expected it to be, but, and this is the first time I will probably ever say this in my life, I love the piece of work I have produced, and it would not be 'what it is' without the two most amazing supervisors. Thank you, truly.

To my amazing friend **Ruby**. Ever since meeting you at Durham University in 2018, I knew we'd get on, and to this day I am so grateful we have been able to share this research process together. From endless 'voice notes', to sitting in silence on Teams as we work 'alongside' each other (200 miles apart!), to sharing chapters, ideas, and sometimes, just having a good moan, I am endlessly grateful to have found a friend to have shared all of this with. I look forward to our virtual celebrations together. Thank you for being so amazing.

To the wonderful staff at **Haberdashers' Monmouth School for Girls**. During the two-and-a-bit years that I was employed at Habs, whilst trying to juggle this research, I was constantly offered classroom or office spaces for meetings and interviews, taking away a little part of that stress that came with attempting to juggle full-time study and work. I miss you all every day and will always appreciate the support offered by you all to my research process.

Finally, to my **interview participants**. This research study would, quite literally, not be what it is without you. Thank you for being brave, being honest, and being such interesting people. I am forever grateful to you for allowing me to share your stories. I hope I have made you proud. Thank you.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1	1
<i>1.1 Language and context to note throughout this thesis.....</i>	<i>4</i>
1.1.1 <i>Living in Love and Faith</i>	4
1.1.2 Nuance of ‘Church’	9
<i>1.2 Broad brush strokes</i>	<i>10</i>
<i>1.3 Research focus</i>	<i>13</i>
1.3.1 Considering: the conversation partners	15
1.3.2 Considering: the nuances and relevance of policy	16
1.3.3 Considering: the position of texts	18
<i>1.4 Identifying the gaps: bisexuality and Christianity</i>	<i>22</i>
1.4.1 The relationship between the LGBT+ community and Christian faith	23
<i>1.5 Research justifications</i>	<i>27</i>
1.5.1 There is a lack of bisexual representation in Christianity	28
1.5.2 Bisexuals face unique challenges, which deserve to be recognised and supported.....	29
1.5.3 Understanding the complexities between faith and plurisexuality	29
1.5.4 There is a lack of research into how Church literature can impact a community.....	30
<i>1.6 Research overview and design.....</i>	<i>31</i>
<i>1.7 Thesis structure.....</i>	<i>32</i>
Chapter 2	35
<i>2.1 Considering lived religion and lived experiences.....</i>	<i>39</i>
2.1.1 What is ‘lived religion’?	40
2.1.2 Lived religion and sexual identity.....	43
2.1.3 Lived religion and youth	48
2.1.4 Section summary.....	53
<i>2.2 Heteronormativity.....</i>	<i>54</i>
2.2.1 Heteronormativity and queer communities	57
2.2.2 Heteronormativity for the bisexual community	60
2.2.3 Heteronormativity in Christianity	64
2.2.4 Heteronormative ideals in Scripture and Church publications: considering biblical understandings of ‘homosexuality’	65
2.2.5 Christian policies, publications and doctrines.....	73
2.2.6 <i>Concluding thoughts</i>	88
Chapter 3	91
<i>3.1 Research methodologies</i>	<i>93</i>
3.1.1 Theoretical frameworks	93
3.1.2 Interpretative phenomenological analysis	94
3.1.3 Queer and bisexual theory	101
3.1.4 Summary of theoretical frameworks	104
<i>3.2 Research Methods</i>	<i>107</i>

3.2.1 Recruitment.....	107
3.2.2 Developing participant questions	116
3.2.3 Interviews.....	130
3.2.4 Coding and thematically analysing data.....	133
3.2.5 Data protection and storage.....	137
3.3 <i>Prior considerations to research methods</i>	140
3.3.1 Considerations prior to project.....	140
3.3.2 The Covid-19 pandemic and online ethics	144
3.3.3 Participant age, and questions of parental consent.....	146
3.3.4 Research incentives	149
3.3.5 Gender bias in research	150
3.3.6 Summary	152
Chapter 4.....	155
4.1 <i>Research aims</i>	156
4.2 <i>A common interest</i>	157
4.3 <i>Further considerations with this data</i>	158
4.4 <i>The impression of Issues</i>	160
4.5 <i>The ‘dehumanisation’ of bisexuality</i>	161
4.6 <i>The apparent ambiguity of bisexuality</i>	166
4.6.1 A lack of clarity?.....	167
4.6.2 Section summary.....	170
4.7 <i>‘Inevitably involves being unfaithful’</i>	171
4.7.1 Misunderstanding bisexuality as equalling promiscuity	172
4.7.2 The stereotype of unfaithfulness	174
4.7.3 Perceived unfaithfulness	179
4.8 <i>‘Truth of their personality [...] achieve a degree of inner healing’</i>	181
4.8.1 What is the bisexual ‘truth’ of personality?	183
4.8.2 Section summary.....	186
4.9 <i>What has happened, and what should happen next?</i>	186
4.9.2 Considering <i>Living in Love and Faith</i> , and the Bishops’ update	189
4.9.3 Returning to the research questions: what does the Church need to change?	193
4.10 <i>To conclude</i>	198
Chapter 5.....	201
5.1 <i>Research statements</i>	205
5.2 <i>Initial thoughts on language, and bisexual experience</i>	206
5.3 <i>Choosing space, and understandings its concepts</i>	208
5.3.1 Space and place for LGBT+ people	208
5.3.2 Space and place in religion and theology.....	209
5.3.3 Space and place for bisexuals.....	210
5.4 <i>Formatting and sharing data with a wider audience: potential impacts</i>	212
5.5 <i>Creating a supportive and affirming environment</i>	214

5.5.1 Affirmation in Christianity.....	215
5.5.2 Support and affirmation are not present within the Church of England.....	218
5.5.3 Support and affirmation are, or are somewhat, present within the Church of England	228
5.5.4 Affirmation is not needed within the Church of England	238
5.5.5 How do we move forward?.....	240
5.6 <i>Combatting misunderstandings of bisexuality in the Church of England</i>	245
5.6.1 Queer and bisexual misunderstandings in Christianity	245
5.6.2 Focusing on the ‘sex’ in bisexuality.....	250
5.6.3 Combatting misunderstandings	254
5.7 <i>Understanding bisexual wariness in Christian spaces</i>	256
5.7.1 Caution: coming out in non-inclusive spaces.....	257
5.7.2 What about bisexuals?.....	259
5.7.3 Further thoughts on the wariness of coming out	260
5.7.4 Combatting bisexual wariness: what needs to be done?	263
5.8 <i>Creating visibility</i>	265
5.8.1 Living with invisibility and ‘heterosexual privilege’	266
5.8.2 Visibility in discourse	268
5.8.3 Improving bisexual visibility	270
5.9 <i>Concluding thoughts</i>	271
Chapter 6.....	275
6.1 <i>Research statements</i>	275
6.2 <i>Defining the scope of Christian marriage</i>	276
6.2.2 Marriage and the Church of England	279
6.3 <i>Marriage and bisexuality</i>	281
6.4 <i>The emerging subthemes</i>	283
6.4.1 Definitions of marriage and potential limitations	283
6.5 <i>Guilt</i>	284
6.5.1 The guilt of ‘straight privilege’	286
6.6 <i>Grappling with the validity of marriage, and the want to marry in church</i>	301
6.6.1 When faith outweighs attraction?.....	303
6.7 <i>Looking forward: Considerations for how the Church of England can progress</i>	307
6.7.1 What, ultimately, does this mean for bisexuals? Considering betrayal.....	307
6.7.2 What, ultimately, does this mean for bisexuals? Considering heartbreak.....	308
6.7.3 What, ultimately, does this mean for bisexuals? A want for change.....	309
Chapter 7	312
7.1 <i>Achieving the research aims of this study</i>	314
7.1.1 ‘To provide a voice for bisexual Christians through the use of qualitative, semi-structured interviews...’	314
7.1.2 ‘To gain an insight [...] with those involved in the <i>LLF</i> project...’	315
7.1.3 ‘Intersect and influence...’	315
7.2 <i>Contribution to the field</i>	316
7.3 <i>Concluding thoughts</i>	317

Reference list	322
Appendix A	356
Appendix B	357
Appendix C	374
Appendix D	376
Appendix E	379
Appendix F	380
Appendix G	397
Appendix H	398
Appendix I	407
Appendix J	411
Appendix K	416

Figures list

Figure 1: A summary of ongoing *LLF* processes since the publication of the main text

Figure 2: The ‘triangulation’ that creates this research study

Figure 3: Significant LGBT+ developments in British society vs. the publication of Church of England documents on human sexuality

Figure 4: Christian denominational attitudes towards the LGBT+ community

Figure 5: Timeline of events

Figure 6: Expressions of interest, and selected participants (Living in Love and Faith group)

Figure 7: Expressions of interest, and selected participants (bisexual Christian group)

Figure 8: The relationship between question groups

Figure 9: The relationships between the semi-structured interview questions

Figure 10: The cyclical nature of creating an ideal bisexual Christian space in the CofE

Figure 11: The cyclical nature of ideal space: creating support and affirmation

Figure 12: The cyclical nature of ideal space: combatting misunderstandings

Figure 13: The cyclical nature of ideal space: understanding wariness

Figure 14: The cyclical nature of ideal space: creating bisexual visibility

Appendices list

Appendix A: Section 5.8 of *Issues in Human Sexuality*

Appendix B: Recruitment documents

Appendix C: Excerpts from research diary

Appendix D: Tweets and blog posts, as referenced in the literature review

Appendix E: Bisexual participant interview transcripts*

Appendix F: Bisexual participant theme tables

Appendix G: *LLF* participant transcripts*

Appendix H: *LLF* participant theme tables

Appendix I: Focus group notes and comments

Appendix J: NVivo software data analysis

Appendix K: Guidance document

*Removed as part of examination process.

Abbreviations and accompanying notes

Bisexual – Bisexual(ity) will be broadly used in this thesis to refer to those *who are attracted to more than one gender identity*.

Throughout this thesis, ‘bisexual’ or ‘bisexuality’ will also be used as opposed to ‘bisexual+’, as it common to see the term ‘bisexual’ referred to within sexuality scholarship. To me as a researcher, to the bisexual Christian participants I interviewed, and in many emerging papers, the term ‘bisexual’ is seen to automatically encompass other plurisexual identities, and whilst using ‘bisexual+’ may be seen as clearer, this particular term was not used by any participants. I do not in any way use the term to diminish the experiences of those who may prefer to identify as pansexual, omnisexual etc., and argue that research into these particular identities should continue to advance. Instead, I am choosing to use the term in light of the diversity that exists under the bisexual umbrella (see Flanders, 2017, for further context). Again, if academic scholarship referenced uses terms such as ‘bisexual+’, this will be accurately reflected within my analysis.

Church, or CofE – Abbreviated titles for the Church of England. These abbreviations will be used interchangeably throughout this thesis. See Footnote 1 in the introduction to this thesis, alongside its accompanying text, for an example of one of these abbreviations being used by the Bishop of London.

LGBT+ - Throughout this thesis, ‘LGBT+’ will be used to refer to *the community of individuals who do not identify as heterosexual and instead define their sexuality in some other way*.

Whilst I understand that using LGBT+ may be misleading, as this could lead to assumptions that I am also researching gender identity, I have chosen to use this term as I argue it to be most commonly understood in discussions of sexuality. I would like to make clear that I am not contributing to discussions surrounding gender identity, but was particularly keen to include this term as, when analysing data from the bisexual participant group, some participants, or their partners, did not identify as cisgender; therefore, I hope that by using LGBT+, I am being inclusive of the participant’s partner’s gender identities. When referring to academic scholarship, if an author uses another term e.g., LGBQ, LGB+ etc., these alternations will be used to reflect the true nature of the scholarship referenced.

Monosexual(ity) – ‘Sexual attraction to one gender’ (Dyer, 2021, p. 60)

Ordination – An ordinand is someone who is ‘training to become a deacon (and then a priest)’ [...] ‘The service at which ordinands become deacons and deacons become priests is called ordination’ (Religion Media Centre, 2019).

Plurisexual(ity) – Plurisexuality is often defined in relation to, or discussed alongside, bisexuality. Definitions of plurisexuality, therefore, often include a relationship to bisexuality to some extent. In an attempt to define plurisexuality in its own way, I turn to Maliepaard and Baumgartner's *Bisexuality in Europe* (2021, p. 10), where the authors argue for the use of the term within their manuscript 'because it *does not linguistically assume monosexuality as the norm, and therefore it gives positive connotations to people who desire more than one sex and/or gender (irrespective of their sexual identity/identities)*'.

Chapter 1

Introduction

‘In 2017, General Synod backed a motion calling for a ban on conversion therapy and, more recently, numerous bishops have publicly called upon Her Majesty’s Government to formally ban this destructive practice. At the same time, this House specifically recommends conversion therapy in “Issues in Human Sexuality” (5.8). How can the House account for this contradiction?’ – *Rev. Mae Christie* (Church of England, 2021b, p. 79)

‘One of the reasons that the Church has embarked on the *Living in Love and Faith* project is because it recognised the failure of previous attempts, such as *Issues in Human Sexuality*, to enable the Church to find a way forward together. We are therefore currently in an uncomfortable period of transition within which such perceived contradictions occur. For the record, paragraph 5.8 in *Issues in Human Sexuality* does not refer explicitly to conversion therapy nor does it use the language of ‘recommendation’. It states: ‘In the situation of the bisexual it can also be that counselling will help the person concerned to discover the truth of their personality and to achieve a degree of inner healing’ – *Bishop Sarah Mullally* (Church of England, 2021b, p. 79)¹

In 2021, the Rev. Mae Christie, of the Diocese of Southwark, posed the presented question to the Chair of the House of Bishops. On behalf of the Chair of the House of Bishops, Sarah Mullally, the Bishop of London, responded with the above answer; she presents a reasonable argument in this context. As many Christian bodies in England grapple with the issue of conversion therapy, we will certainly move through an ‘uncomfortable period of transition’². Four months prior to the above

¹ As Bishop Mullally has done so here, the Church of England, throughout this thesis, will often be referred to as ‘the Church’. If another Christian denomination is being discussed (for example the Catholic Church, the Methodist Church, etc.), then the full names of institutions will be used to avoid any confusion. The Church of England may also be referred to throughout as the ‘CofE’.

² According to Conine, Campau, and Petronelli (2022, p. 6), ‘conversion therapy refers to any practices intended to alter a person’s sexual orientation, gender expression, gender identity, or any combination thereof’. Whilst the use of ‘therapy’ may lead some to believe that conversion therapy has ‘therapeutic benefit’, the results are in fact the opposite, with practices often inflicting harm upon those subjected to it. As of 2020, it has been identified that conversion therapy is ‘performed in over 60 countries’ (Alempijevic et al., 2020, p. 1). Conversion therapy happens in a variety of settings, from healthcare and medical, to within communities, or within the home, and practices can include ‘talk therapy or psychotherapy [...]; group therapy; medication [...]; Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing [...]; electroshock or electroconvulsive therapy’ and arguably more extreme efforts, including humiliation, exorcism, or isolation (Alempijevic et al., 2020, p. 1). For many individuals who experience conversion therapy, this practice is introduced to them in a faith setting; ‘51% of those subjected to a form of conversion therapy reported it was conducted by a faith organisation or group’ (Stonewall, no date). The Ozanne Foundation’s 2018 (p. 5) ‘National Faith and Sexuality Survey’ executive report reveals in its results that nearly three quarters of survey participants engaged with the process

comments, in the July Synod sessions, Bishop Mullally herself stated that she ‘would want to underline that the Church of England has said we would want to see the banning of conversion therapy’ (Church of England, 2021a, p. 105). But despite this call to ban being backed by the General Synod, other religious bodies are not so forthcoming. In December 2021, over 2,500 Christian ministers wrote to then Equalities Minister Liz Truss warning ‘the Government that, whilst they don’t wish to break the law, they are willing to be criminalised if an overly broad ban [on conversion therapy] which covers preaching, prayer and pastoral care is introduced’ (The Christian Institute, 2022)³. Peter Lynas, the UK director of the Evangelical Alliance, argued that whilst ‘abusive practices’ and ‘extreme forms’ of conversion therapy should be banned, further bans would ‘risk preventing gay Christians who want to remain celibate from seeking support’ (bbc.co.uk, 2021).

Let us return to Rev. Christie’s statement where she mentions the specific recommendation of conversion therapy in Section 5.8 of *Issues in Human Sexuality* (hereon referred to as *Issues* when appropriate). To put this into context, Section 5.8 of *Issues* states the following:

‘The first is that of bisexuality. We recognise that there are those whose sexual orientation is ambiguous, and who can find themselves attracted to partners of either sex. Nevertheless, it is clear that bisexual activity must always be wrong for this reason, if for no other, that it inevitably involves being unfaithful. The Church’s guidance to bisexual Christians is that if they are capable of heterophile relationships and of satisfaction within them, they should

of conversion therapy because they ‘believed that [their] [...] desires were “sinful” or because their “religious leader disapproved” [of their LGBT+ lifestyle]’.

³ Affinity, a ‘network of [...] bible-centred churches and evangelical agencies’, shared the following quotation from the letter on their webpage, where they encouraged others to read and sign the letter: ‘In our churches we welcome and show love to many people who have different experiences and views, including same-sex attraction and forms of gender transition. We always seek to act in love, with gentleness and respect, for the good of all, and never with any form of coercion or control. The category of ‘Conversion Therapy’ is one which is so broad as to be essentially meaningless. It has the effect of implying an equivalence between calling people to conversion to Christ, which is our duty as Christian ministers, and evil and disreputable past practices which are already illegal and which Christians are the first to condemn. Legislating against such a bizarrely broad category is clearly not viable and strongly risks criminalising us as we fulfil our compassionate duties as Christian ministers and pastors. This would be a clear breach of our legal right to manifest our religion’ (Graham Nicholls, for Affinity.org.uk, 2021).

follow the way of holiness in either celibacy or abstinence or heterosexual marriage. In the situation of the bisexual, it can also be that counselling will help the person concerned to discover the truth of their personality and to achieve a degree of inner healing' (House of Bishops, 1991, p. 42).

In a document that dedicates only one 119-word paragraph to bisexuality, it is concerning that the issue of conversion therapy – one that affects the entire LGBT+ community – is attributed to just one sexual orientation. The language used in *Issues* not only downplays the experiences of those affected by the harmful practices of conversion therapy, but also singles out the bisexual community as an 'other', perpetuating a divisive narrative. Even more disconcerting, if not alarming, is the way this abusive language is casually dismissed or excused before a 21st-century Synod audience. As the Synod period progressed, bisexual Christians and their allies took to Twitter, pulling apart the language of Section 5.8 and calling for the text to be removed from the CofE ordination process⁴. Most significantly, bisexual Christians seized the opportunity to stress to the Church and broader Christian community that, contrary to prevalent misconceptions, bisexuality does not equal promiscuity, nor does it necessitate any kind of psychological intervention. In their outcries, the bisexual community emphasised that bisexuals are simply human, possessing a sexual orientation as legitimate as any other, something that the CofE, I would argue, still struggles to comprehend. By engaging with both the bisexual community and participants involved in the Church's *Living in Love and Faith* project (hereon referred to as *LLF* when appropriate), this research seeks to highlight the existing gaps in knowledge regarding bisexuality within the CofE, and how the language of Church scholarship can impact particular communities. The goal is to offer guidance on how the Church can progress in enhancing its inclusion of bisexual individuals.

⁴ Further information on the social responses to *Issues*, especially during this period of Twitter unrest, can be found in the literature review.

1.1 Language and context to note throughout this thesis

1.1.1 *Living in Love and Faith*

The phrase '*Living in Love and Faith*' (*LLF*) will be referred to frequently throughout this thesis. Due to the vast scope of discussions and documentation that are referred to under the *Living in Love and Faith* umbrella, throughout this thesis, when referring to *Living in Love and Faith*, I am referring explicitly to the book, published in November 2020 and, in light of the theme of this thesis, its discussions of bisexuality. If another element of the *LLF* process is referenced, such as the online resources, this will be explicitly noted⁵. It should also be stated that within this thesis, five participants are referred to as the 'LLF participants', and are subsequently coded LLF001 through 005. They are referred to in this way, firstly to differentiate them from the bisexual Christian participants, and secondly, due to their involvement in one of the five LLF Working Groups (the Co-Ordinating Group, the Biblical Studies Working Group, the Theology Working Group, the History Working Group, and the Social and Biological Sciences Working Group).

⁵ The wider scope of *LLF* constitutes many elements. When we consider resources that have been produced alongside the main text, we are also referring to or examining the *LLF* course book for groups; the 16-episode podcast; the online library, which contains over 300 resources; the 16 Story films; the Pastoral Principles, and *Listening in Love and Faith*, a gathered response document. These documents provide further clarity to the inadequacy of both Church understandings of bisexuality, and bisexual lived experience, as alongside the main text, there is further lack of visibility within these resources. Session 2 of the *LLF* course book (Church of England, 2020c, pp. 15 – 28) engages with concepts of Christians' identities in Christ and how they relate to sex, gender, and sexual identity. Whilst listing, and therefore recognising, some identities, including a mention of bisexuality, there is no encouragement to discuss what bisexuality may mean or how bisexuals may explore or understand their identity in relation to their Christianity. The *LLF* library houses a search function, allowing users to browse its many resources by term. A search of the library – using the term 'bisexual' – only heeds four results: two reviews on mental health, wellbeing, and counselling for LGBT+ people, one academic handbook on gender, sexuality and theology, and a global encyclopedia on LGBT+ history. It should be noted that there are resources in the library that discuss homosexual lived experiences, such as autobiographies, but none that focus on bisexual lived experiences in a Christian context. Within the 16 short Story films, only one participant explicitly refers to their identity as bisexual, however the focus of the video does not discuss their sexuality at all, but instead focuses on the transgender journey of their partner. Both the podcast episodes and Pastoral Principles provide no reference to bisexuality. Finally, in *Listening in Love and Faith*, much as in *Living in Love and Faith*, references to bisexuality very much focus on statistics and definitions; there is absolutely no insight into lived experience, nor is an understanding of bisexuality within a Church context shown. This strongly limited focus on bisexuality within the other resources, I would argue, assists in emphasising the lack of bisexual recognition in the main text, but also reiterates why these other resources are not referred to throughout this thesis; simply, they do not provide significant ground for discussion.

Although *LLF* as a text is the focal piece of the wider process noted within this thesis, it is vital to recognise how wider discussions as part of the full *LLF* process continue to happen into the present day. The following table provides a succinct summary of ongoing Church processes surrounding *LLF*. In order to provide a suitable end point, February 2024 has been chosen as the cut off point for noting formally documented Church proceedings.

Figure 1: A summary of ongoing *LLF* processes since the publication of the main text

A cut-off date of February 2024 has been agreed for this timeline.

Date	Event	Points to note
November 2020	<i>Living in Love and Faith</i> book and accompanying resources (website, podcasts, leaflets and discussion guidance) published.	
2021 - 2022	Church of England churches are encouraged to use the <i>LLF</i> accompanying study materials to encourage discussion in church spaces. The deadline for churches to respond to the course of study is set at April 2022.	
July 2022	<i>Listening in Love and Faith</i> is published, summarising feedback gathered from <i>LLF</i> discussion responses.	
February 2023	Paper GS 2289 (Church of England, 2023f) from the General Synod meetings shows that proposals are welcomed which would enable same-sex couples to receive blessings and to give thanks in a Church of England space after a civil ceremony. These prayers are known as <i>Prayers of Love and Faith</i>. The paper also recommends the creation of a new Pastoral Guidance to replace <i>Issues in Human Sexuality</i>, to be released in mid-2023.	General Synod Questions Notice Paper 2 from February 2023 (Church of England, 2023e, p. 11) refers to Question 166, which states the following: ‘The Revd Mae Christie (Southwark) to ask the Chair of the House of Bishops: At what point will <i>Issues in Human Sexuality</i> no longer be a document in use by the Church of England?’. The Bishop of London, to reply on behalf of the Chair of the House of Bishops: ‘When the new Pastoral Guidance has been finalised and approved by the House of Bishops, <i>Issues in Human Sexuality</i> will be rescinded. It is hoped that this will take place by July 2023’. Annex A of General Synod paper 2289 from February 2023 (p. 3) also states the following: ‘A want to celebrate faithfulness in relationships, alongside a desire for welcoming and acceptance, has encouraged the Church to work towards a new resource known as <i>Prayers in Love and Faith</i>. This resource will offer clergy a variety of flexible ways to affirm and celebrate same-sex couples in church, and will include prayers of dedication, thanksgiving and for God’s blessing [...] A further recognition of the diversity of the Church is to come through new Pastoral Guidance, that will explain the practical implications of this way forward, including for the discernment of vocations within the Church of England. This new guidance will replace <i>Issues in Human Sexuality</i>’.

		Samuel Wilson, of the Diocese of Chester, questioned the following regarding <i>Issues</i>. The language noted here will be discussed at length within this thesis: ‘When I think about Issues in Human Sexuality and the Pastoral Guidance that is going to replace it, I have two questions. Will it, like Issues in Human Sexuality, say that, as someone who is attracted to people of various genders and people who do not subscribe to gender binaries, I am inherently promiscuous? Because that is what it says’ (2023, p. 549).
July 2023	Paper GS 2303 states that further work is to be done: ‘The vote on the motion at the February General Synod marked an important moment in the work of LLF [...] In response to this debate [...] they [the Bishops] have recognised that further work needs to be undertaken to reassure people as we move on from the motion. The current phase of work seeks to implement the actions agreed in the motion, including refining the Prayers of Love and Faith (PLF) and developing Pastoral Guidance, together with setting up a Pastoral Consultative Group to take these elements forward beyond this phase of work’ (Church of England, 2023d, p. 1).	
November 2023	Synod discussions emphasise significant disagreements within the Church of England on issues of sexuality. The Bishop of London highlights efforts to maintain unity despite profound theological differences, stating that Scripture can be interpreted to support both conservative and progressive viewpoints. Discussions aim to seek a way forward where members could live together with disagreements while remaining part of the body of Christ.	The Synod's deliberations incorporated theological resources from the LLF initiative, which serves as the Church's attempt to address these tensions constructively. A focus was pinpointed by the Bishop of London and the Archbishop of Canterbury on balancing theological integrity with legal considerations while navigating disagreements.
December 2023	Pastoral Guidance is finally released.	
February 2024	The Bishop of Newcastle, Helen-Ann Hartley, resigns from the <i>Living in Love and Faith</i> process due to ‘serious concerns relating to the recent process of appointing an Interim Theological	A definition of homophobia is provided within the Group of Sessions 2024 document. As will be considered as a wider point within the rest of this thesis, the definition fails to consider prejudice towards those outside of the binary: ‘The following definition of homophobia underlies the

	Advisor to the House of Bishops' (Diocese of Newcastle, 2024).	LLF resources and can be found on p. 426 of the LLF book: "sexual prejudice against gay/lesbian people; it is not a phobia in the strict sense and fear may be only one of the negative feelings experienced or expressed towards gay/lesbian people. Homophobia may be internalised by gay/lesbian people so that they experience negative feelings and attitudes towards themselves in relation to their sexual identity". (Church of England, 2020, p. 57)

1.1.2 Nuance of ‘Church’

When we consider the different ways in which *LLF* can be understood as a concept, Synod discussions from 2023 can provide a fruitful consideration for the nuance of the term ‘church’. For example, discrepancies in response to the proposal to replace *Issues* between bishops, clergy and laity can lead us to query what is meant by the ‘Church’, particularly when considering ‘Church’ responses, positions, or policies.

In a Church of England context, the term ‘church’ (including whether capitalised or not) can take on many meanings. In everyday conversation, the word ‘church’ may refer to the physical structure where worship occurs; a specific building where the local congregation gathers for prayer, Eucharist, and other rites. Beyond its architectural identity, a church building is considered sacred - a consecrated space for meeting God, holding worship, and performing sacraments, imbuing the physical church with theological significance. The term ‘church’, or ‘Church’ may be used to refer to parish communities; the congregation, as a body of worshippers who gather together; the body of Christ, as a spiritual community transcending local or institutional boundaries; or the universal Church, referring to all Christian believers worldwide.

Often, when we consider the latter, capitalised form, the term ‘Church’ refers to the Church of England as a formal institution, including its hierarchy, governance, liturgical traditions, and doctrine. When we focus upon this particular meaning, we may place our attention upon different groups of people. For example, the ‘Church’ may constitute Bishops; as individuals with a responsibility to guard doctrine, provide pastoral care, and represent the Church as a whole, they connote the formal and administrative body of governance. We may think of clergymen as representing the body of the Church, as those who represent the institutional church in local parishes

and administer sacraments. Lastly, we may think of laity who, whilst not ordained, participate in the governance of the Church through Synods and councils, sharing in the mission of the Church and constituting a part of its institutional identity.

Contemplating these differences, alongside the discrepancies in response to replacing *Issues* shown throughout the Synod Report of Proceedings (*see various*, Church of England, 2023), leads us to question that when we consider the ‘Church’, and discuss ‘its’ policies, with whom or what are we referring to? Are we considering the Bishops responses and proposals in particular, or a mixed outcome of policies or documents proposed by Bishops, clergy people and laity? Within this thesis, ‘Church’ policies are indeed referred to in a broad sense. Whilst this plays deeply to nuance, throughout this thesis, the particular authors of certain Church publications are starkly noted; for example, *Issues in Human Sexuality* is clearly noted as a Bishops publication. In turn, when referring to recent statements or apologies, these again are noted as being authored by Bishops. Whilst understanding the incredibly nuanced nature of the term ‘church’ or ‘Church’, which has been emphasised in recent times by discussions surrounding *Issues* and *LLF*, when referred to throughout this thesis in relation to publication or policy, we are referring here often to the Bishops of the Church of England, unless otherwise stated. A further discussion of the relationship between policy, those who create it, and religious adherents – in particular for this thesis, queer religious adherents – will be discussed later in this chapter.

1.2 Broad brush strokes

I will begin this introduction with a broad overview of core contextual setting; this is by no means all encompassing, but serves to enable the reader, who may or may not be familiar with the wider context, to understand wider areas of discussion around bisexuality. Particular examinations

will include bisexuality in the health sector, within the public eye, and in educational settings.

Often struggling to fit in to a ‘heteronormative and binary-focused world (Dunlop *et al.*, 2022, p. 760), bisexual individuals face stigma and discrimination in various aspects of their lives such as healthcare, schooling, or in the public eye (for example, on television or in written literature). A lack of understanding of bisexuality in the health sector can lead to sexual health problems, with a greater number of bisexual women contracting STIs and HIV than women who identify with another sexual orientation. Similarly, a smaller number of bisexual women choose to access smear tests than their counterparts (Flanders *et al.*, 2019, p. 1117). Bisexuals often experience ‘poorer mental health’ than their homosexual and heterosexual counterparts (Taylor, 2018, p. 83), and are more likely to engage in substance abuse (Feinstein and Dyar, 2017, p. 42) with bisexuals being particularly at risk of non-suicidal self-injury (Dunlop *et al.*, 2022, p. 756).

In the public eye, bisexual lifestyles are often misrepresented. Television programmes and films provide a key source of learning in this area. In 2018, a review undertaken by GLAAD ‘found that [...] 18.2% of films [...] contained LGBTQ characters, the second highest percentage in seven years’ (de Barros, 2020, p. 104). However, this representation was not equal; ‘67% of queer characters on television and 55% of queer characters in movies are gay men or lesbian women, despite bisexual people being estimated as the majority of the LGB [...] community in the United States’ (de Barros, 2020, p. 105). de Barros (2020) argues that this lack of visual representation could be a contributing factor to the higher-than-average poor mental health of bisexuals (as noted above). Nonetheless, in recent years, bisexual representation in the media has begun to develop. For example, the introduction of Nick Nelson in Netflix’s *Heartstopper* (2022) provided viewers with a beautiful coming of age story, as Nick begins to ‘uncover his bisexuality and overcome his own internal biases’

(Wills, for collider.com, 2021). Previously, when a character on a soap opera began to experience attraction to more than one gender, this was often found to be a transitional phase between hetero- and homosexuality, with the character concluding by the end of an episode that they are either gay or straight (Barker and Langdridge, 2008, p. 390)⁶. In his article on *EastEnders* harmful portrayal of bisexual characters, Lawton (for The Conversation, 2019) argues that these characters are often subject to many stereotypes, such as being ‘greedy, overly sexual, and unfaithful partners’ and that ‘such portrayals only harm awareness about bisexuality and indeed contribute to the particularly bad mental health of many bisexual people’.

Biphobia and bisexual abuse are also common within schooling, although research has shown that this is not a blanket experience for bisexuals. Schools can often ‘be a site of tension and conflict, especially if a student is stigmatised as different from others, for instance, in terms of ethnicity, sexual orientation or religion’ (Page and Yip, 2012, p. 405). Elia (2010, p. 454) argues that bisexuality is often absent within school curriculums as it ‘‘messes up’ the hetero/homosexual binary on which school policy, practices and programmes depend’ (McAllum, 2018, p. 256). In Stonewall’s (2018, p. 3) guidance on celebrating bisexual inclusion in secondary schools, it is stated that bisexual students are often overlooked, as their experiences are automatically assumed to be the same as lesbian or gay students. In The Stonewall School Report (2017a, p. 6), it was stated that 36% of

⁶ Throughout this thesis, I will use language of ‘gender’ as opposed to ‘sex’ and will also use ‘another’ as opposed to ‘opposite’, e.g., referring to an individual as being ‘another gender’ instead of the ‘opposite gender’. Whilst my research does not focus on gender explicitly, I am adopting this language in order to be inclusive of different gender identities, including those who identify as non-binary. I argue that the word ‘opposite’ has binary connotations, and in the context of this study, I argue it is possible, for example, for a femme presenting bisexual woman and masc-presenting non-binary individual (who, for the sake of argument, was born male) to successfully marry in church. Throughout this thesis, to emulate the work of Bartholomay and Pendleton (2023), I will use phrase such as ‘mixed-gender marriages’ or ‘attracted to someone of another gender’. If other research is being directly quoted, and if this research uses language such as same-sex or opposite sex, then this will be accurately reflected.

students had heard biphobic language ‘frequently’ or ‘often’ in their corridors and classrooms⁷. This data aligns with Anderson, McCormack, and Ripley’s (2016, p. 28) research, where female sixth form students commented on how they had often been referred to as ‘sexually predatory’ for being bisexual or were told by classmates that bisexuality did not exist. This disapproval often came from students who were religious, or who identified as gay or lesbian. However, bisexual experiences were not entirely negative; participants within the study ‘reported that they experienced less discrimination and marginalisation as time progressed’ (p. 28), with their bisexuality often accepted after some time.

1.3 Research focus

The primary focus of this thesis is to critically examine the sexual and religious lives of bisexual CofE Christians, aged between 18 and 25. The geographical positioning of this research study, alongside my own previous affiliations to, and understandings of, the Church of England, led me to place my focus here. Similarly, my identity as a bisexual woman encouraged me to consider how others within the same community as myself experienced life within the CofE. My journey towards identifying as bisexual/queer began in my teenage years when I realised that my attraction to others was not limited to the ‘opposite’ gender. In my late teens, whilst attending university, I embraced the Christian faith and eventually chose to be confirmed in the CofE. During this period, I also felt a sense of Christian vocation and contemplated ordination within the Church. Throughout my time worshipping within the CofE, I never felt compelled to merge these two aspects of my

⁷ I am aware of the recent controversy that surrounds Stonewall and debates of transgender rights. Churchill (2021) notes that ‘Stonewall is a firm defender of the belief that people should be able to self-identify with the gender they choose, but has also been accused of attempting to stifle free speech on the issue [...] shutting down any debate’. In turn, many organisations have chosen to step away from Stonewall’s Diversity Champions scheme, including the Equality and Human Rights Commission (McManus, 2021). As discussed in the above footnote, whilst I am fully supportive of the transgender community and their ongoing fight for equality, this thesis in itself does not pay close detail to the nuances of gender identity, focusing instead on sexual identity. With this in mind, alongside considering the publication dates of the documents used from Stonewall, I argue that the data used within my argument here is beneficial, relevant, and uncontroversial.

identity; I identified as ‘Christian’ and ‘bisexual’, but never felt a want or need to form an explicit ‘bisexual Christian’ identity. Unfortunately, there were many occasions where both elements of my identity faced scrutiny and questioning, often simultaneously. I frequently encountered enquiries about how being a queer Christian ‘works’, and whether I feared judgement or damnation for my attractions to other gender identities. Additionally, there were external doubts about the validity of my bisexuality, having only been in relationships with individuals of another gender. These comments, which I would argue are rooted in a deep misunderstanding of the sexuality spectrum, contributed to feelings of internalised biphobia, due to a constant ‘denigration of bisexuality as a valid life choice’ (Bennett, 1992, p. 207). The persistent questioning of my sexuality was joined by a questioning of faith when I entered a different university environment where many of my Christian peers held more conservative views. Ultimately, I felt alienated from the CofE and its ordination process, and from thereon, struggled to engage with organised religion until I chose to stop worshipping in the Church altogether.

Despite what may be regarded as negative experiences which could colour my opinion of the relationships between bisexuality and the Church of England, as a researcher, I recognise the evolving landscapes of research and acknowledge the differentiations that exist within community experiences. With this in mind, I understand that investigating the intersections between bisexuality and Christianity require additional examination beyond the primary focus of this study mentioned at the start of this section.

As the Synod discussions between Rev. Christie and Bishop Mullally emphasise, there is a significant misunderstanding within the higher ranks of the Church regarding the experiences of bisexual people, and the challenges they face. Keeping this in consideration, my intention is to

establish a connection between the lived experiences of bisexual CofE Christians, and the perspectives of those holding positions of influence, who are involved in publication. Aware that *Issues* was not the most recent document to discuss sexuality, and bisexuality, as a whole, I turned my attention to *LLF*, a key text that was published two months after beginning my research process, and most importantly, included a list of all scholars and clergy involved, therefore providing a pool from which I could select participants for interview. Interviewing these participants would allow me an insight into the thought processes that exist behind the creation of Church policy and publications, alongside what those involved in these processes believe the bisexual lived experience to be.

1.3.1 Considering: the conversation partners

When considering both participant groups mentioned above, I wish to stress the importance of these two groups, and how they represent themselves as the main conversation partners within this thesis. As will be referred to frequently throughout this research study, whilst some research exists that focuses on bisexual Christian lived experience (see Toft, Yip, Shepherd throughout), there is a lack of research that focuses on the impact of church policies on Christian communities, and its relationship with lived experience. I argue that the interviews that will be conducted with bisexual Christians who worship within the CofE will provide an elevated knowledge of lived experiences; experiences that are up-to-date, relevant, and will allow us to understand how modern bisexual Christians navigate the complexities of their faith lives and sexual orientations. The interviews with academics and clergy involved in the *LLF* project will provide a yet to be seen insight into the processes involved in creating Christian publications, and how those involved in these processes attempt to navigate their own understandings of bisexual Christian lived experiences. Both sets of participants will, I would claim, encourage conversations that are yet to happen in the Church of England and provide a cross-reference of knowledge that has not yet been encouraged to grow.

1.3.2 Considering: the nuances and relevance of policy

As discussed in Section 1.1.2, the term ‘Church’ is deeply nuanced, and a similar complexity can be observed in the use of the term ‘policy’. In seeking to understand ‘policy’ in a religious context, especially for queer adherents, we must consider both its definitions and implications.

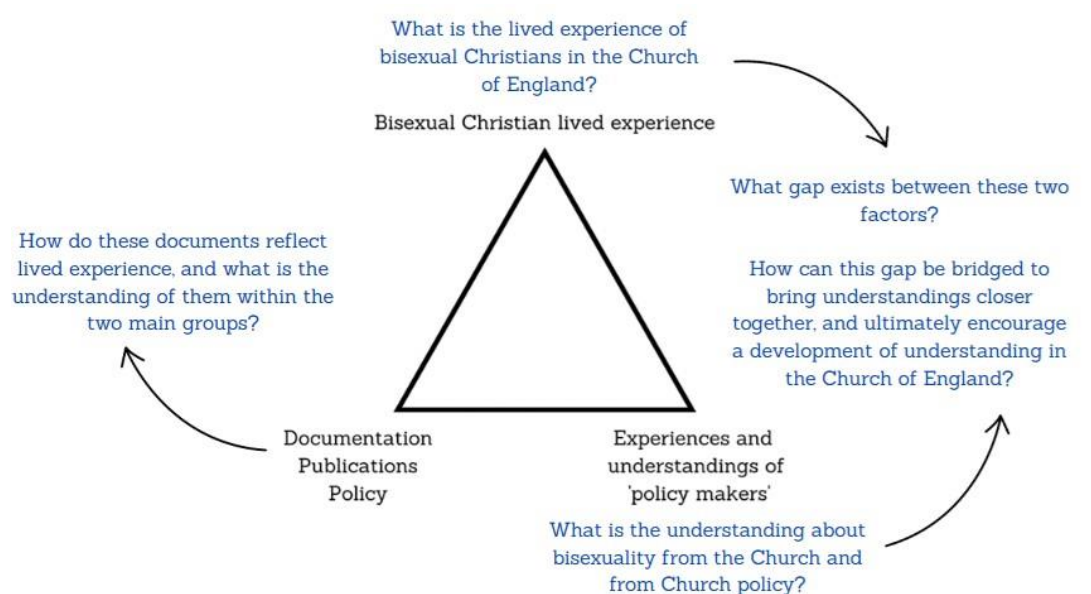
Generally, a policy refers to a set of principles or rules that guide behaviour and maintain standards within organisations. Within religious contexts, policy shapes belief, practice, and moral decision-making, influencing how adherents interpret texts, engage in worship, and live their daily lives. These guidelines manifest in everyday practices such as dress, diet, and social interaction, becoming a lived expression of faith. Although policy is often associated with institutions, this thesis uses the term loosely in reference to the Church of England. A search of the CofE website reveals few public-facing policies, focusing mainly safeguarding and health and safety. However, it would be inaccurate to suggest the absence of broader policy-like frameworks. The General Synod enacts legislation and Measures, whilst Canons Ecclesiastical and other forms of subordinate legislation also govern practice (Church of England, 2023b). Foundational documents like the Thirty-Nine Articles, the Book of Common Prayer, Common Worship, and the Bible also function doctrinally, shaping moral and ethical understanding.

But how do these frameworks engage with sexuality? Policies, explicit or otherwise, strongly influence how adherents approach issues such as marriage and sexuality. For queer Christians, such guidance may either affirm their identity or create internal conflict. Within the CofE, recent debates on sexuality have centred on the *Living in Love and Faith* process. Initiated after backlash from the General Synod in 2017 (Sherwood, 2017b), *LLF* was not designed to change doctrine, and neither it nor the earlier Pilling Report claimed to be ‘policy’. Nonetheless, such documents offer guidance

and encourage reflection, shaping the decisions and behaviours of clergy and laypeople alike. Though not labelled as policy, texts like *Issues in Human Sexuality* often function as such, with clergy expected to live within their boundaries. This blurred distinction between policy, doctrine, and guidance can be confusing. We are thus left to ask: what is the appropriate language for these texts? Whilst ‘documents’ or ‘publications’ are neutral alternatives, they may not fully capture the prescriptive or influential nature of these writings.

Therefore, this thesis will use the terms ‘policy’, ‘document’, and ‘publication’ interchangeably, recognising the varied ways these texts operate within the Church. Figure 2 outlines these understandings and highlights the broader scope of ‘policy-makers’ as all those who facilitate and influence these discussions within the Church.

Figure 2: The ‘triangulation’ that creates this research study



This research also relies on a pivotal argument, asserting that CofE policies and publications on human sexuality present a broadly negative and inaccurate portrayal of bisexuality. Whilst there have been minor developments within this field over the last 30 years, the persistent reliance on outdated documents such as *Issues* reflects a lack of progression on behalf of the Church.

1.3.3 Considering: the position of texts

As debated in Section 1.3.2, policies and publications can have various impacts on LGBT+ religious adherents. I would argue that this is particularly prevalent for bisexual Christians, who often do not see their identity represented wholly, if at all, within Church documentation. The literature review for this thesis will discuss certain CofE texts in more detail, however it is important to note what other documents mention bisexuality, and to what extent, alongside *Issues*.

Bisexuality is mentioned in four texts in varying degrees of recognition: *Issues in Human Sexuality* (1991), *Some Issues in Human Sexuality* (2003), The Pilling Report (2013; also known as Report of the House of Bishops Working Group on Human Sexuality) and *Living in Love and Faith* (2020). *Issues* presents one paragraph on bisexuality, where bisexuals are deemed to be ‘ambiguous’, ‘unfaithful’, and should consider counselling to ‘discover the truth of their personality’. Bisexuality is next mentioned in 2003, in *Some Issues*. This text provides a broad analytical response to the language used throughout *Issues*, and provides considerations for the insinuations made, including what is said about bisexuality (e.g., is it right to suggest marriage for bisexuals?). The Pilling Report, published ten years later, provides further brief comments on bisexuality, and is the first document published on human sexuality to engage with LGBT+ Christians. The report provides a statistical insight into bisexuality, referring to statistics from the 2011-12 ONS Integrated Household Survey (in response to the sexual identity question, 0.4% of individuals identified themselves as bisexual).

The report also states that the human population should not be considered ‘in terms of a fixed binary’ (House of Bishops, 2013, p. 61) and that society should be accepting of those who identify as bisexual, or sexually fluid (even if these individuals only exist in a ‘significant minority’ or ‘small numbers’). It is not then until 2020 that bisexuality is mentioned again, in *Living in Love and Faith*. Bisexuality is mentioned 29 times in a document that spans over 460 pages, with a limited focus on any form of knowledge-sharing or critical understanding. There are a very small handful of personal bisexual experiences, but the text does not progress much further than this.

One such factor that has been missed when examining the lived experiences of LGBT+ Christians, and bisexuals in particular, is their responses to policy, and perhaps more critically, what those involved in the creation of these publications believe of textual attitudes and language surrounding certain identities. Therefore, the selection of the two interview groups was deemed essential in order to explore the gap between those involved in policies and publication, and their attitudes towards the aforementioned factors, and those whom policies and publication are written about, and their lived experiences. Whilst this research will acknowledge that Church policies and publications are a significant factor within this discussion, it also recognises that these documents do not conclude a conversation. Instead, they must be openly critiqued alongside the lived experience of those that they discuss, and this discussion is yet to happen; this emphasises the importance of this research study. When considering this lived experience and the relationship between it and documentation, it is critical to hold a broad understanding of cultural context; this allows opportunities to reflect on why language may be presented in certain ways. With this in mind, Figure 3 below presents contextual societal developments within British society, alongside the publication of Church documents on sexuality, including those mentioned above.

Figure 3: Significant LGBT+ developments in British society vs. the publication of Church of England documents on humansexuality

The below dates have been sourced via the LGBT Archive (lgbthistoryuk.org). Information pertaining to Church of England publications has been largely collated via the Church of England website and the Religion Media Centre.

Date	Social context in the United Kingdom	Church of England publications on sexuality
1967	Homosexuality is decriminalised in England and Wales	
1970	The Gay Liberation Front is established	
1972	First Gay Pride rally is held in London	
1979		‘Homosexual Relationships’ A contribution for discussion’ (sometimes known as ‘The Gloucester Report’) is published
1980(s)	The AIDS epidemic begins	
1984	The Politics of Bisexuality signals the growth of a ‘separate’ bisexual community	
1986	‘AIDS: Don’t Die of Ignorance’ campaign shown on British television	
1988	Section 28 introduced, banning the ‘promotion’ of homosexuality	
1989		The Osborne Report is completed, but publication is suppressed
1991		<i>Issues in Human Sexuality</i> is published by the Church of England House of Bishops
1992	The Church of England votes to allow gay priests	
1998		Lambeth I.10 passed, affirming the view that marriage is between a man and a woman
2000	The ban on LGBT people serving in the military is lifted The Journal of Bisexuality is created Scotland abolishes Section 28	
2002	Same-sex couples are granted equal rights to adopt	
2003	Section 28 is repealed in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland	<i>Some Issues in Human Sexuality</i> is published by the Church of England House of Bishops
2004	Civil partnerships are introduced	The Windsor Report is published

	The Gender Recognition Act is passed	
2005		The House of Bishops Statement on Civil Partnerships is published
2010	The Equality Act 2010 is introduced	
2012		‘Government consultation on same-sex marriage’ (GS Misc 1027) is published
2013	Queen Elizabeth II grants Alan Turing a posthumous pardon	The Pilling Report is published Men and Women in Marriage (GS Misc 1046) is published
2014	Same-sex marriage is legalised in England and Wales	Bishops Pastoral Guidance on Same-Sex Marriage is published
2016	40 MPs in Parliament identify as LGBT+; at the time, that is more than in any other parliament in the world Nicholas Chamberlain becomes the first Bishop in the Church of England to come out as gay	
2020	Same-sex marriage legalised in Northern Ireland	<i>Living in Love and Faith</i> is published by the Church of England, after being delayed by the Covid-19 pandemic
2021	Queen Elizabeth II announces that a ban on conversion therapy is to be brought forward to Parliament The UK census has questions on sexual and gender identity for the first time	
2022	Queer Britain, the UK’s first LGBT museum, opens in London The ‘Gender Recognition Reform (Scotland)’ Bill is passed in Scotland and awaits royal assent. This bill would make it easier for Scottish people to change their legal gender	
2023	The UK Government uses Section 35 of the Scotland Act (1998) to block the bill from receiving royal assent	Fourteen Bishops publish a document assenting to a traditional view of marriage Bishops in the Church of England release a statement stating that they aim to develop their understandings of sexual identities such as bisexuality and asexuality, and gender identities such as genderfluidity and non-binary Draft prayers of Love and Faith published

1.4 Identifying the gaps: bisexuality and Christianity

The contextual overview in Section 1.2 has only identified a limited range of research on bisexuality that is outside of the focus of this thesis. However, it underscores the stigma and prejudice encountered by bisexuals, emphasising the distinctiveness of their experiences within the broader LGBT+ community. As will be shown throughout this thesis, bisexual Christians encounter further distinct prejudices, particularly within the CofE, encouraging an advocacy for further research into the bisexual Christian community. Research in this area thus far has focused upon the ‘Bi/Christ’ and the inclusiveness of the incarnation (Althaus-Reid, 2000); the wider experiences of bisexual people of faith (Koldony, 2000); bisexual perspectives on same-sex marriage, the differences in the lived experiences of French and British bisexual Christians, and bisexual Christian spirituality (Yip 2003; 2004; 2010; 2017); negotiations of sexuality and faith for bisexuals (Toft 2014; 2020a; 2020b); and bisexuality within Western Christian contexts (Shepherd, 2017; 2019; 2020). Whilst these research areas cover a broad scope of bisexual Christianity, I would argue that further, more detailed research must be undertaken into the lived experience of bisexual Christians and in particular, a focus must be placed on the relationship between these experiences, and that of Christian policies or publications, as the latter is near absent from bisexual Christian theology⁸. Before discussing the exact parameters of my study within my research focus, to expand on Section 1.2, I first wish to examine a wider scope of Christian attitudes towards bisexuality, and issues that affect this community.

⁸ The *Journal of Bisexuality*, the official journal of the American Institute of Bisexuality and arguably the most prominent journal within the field of bisexual studies, houses surprisingly little research into bisexuality and faith. The journal has been published since 2000, and a search within its records raises the following results: ‘bisexuality and Christianity’ – 147 entries; ‘bisexuality and faith’ – 305 entries; ‘bisexuality and religion’ – 305 entries: unsurprisingly, there is a large cross-section of articles, where more than one key term has been used. The SAGE Journals online depository heralds the following results: ‘bisexuality and religion’ – 6252 entries; ‘bisexuality and faith’ – 6364 entries; ‘bisexuality and Christianity’ – 2636 entries. Whilst these figures on the surface seem much higher, when sorting articles by relevance, the top article consistently remains the same (a piece by Toft, 2014), and the remaining articles listed do not in any way mention faith, religion, or Christianity within their titles or abstracts. I would argue this only emphasises that, whilst research on bisexuality is flourishing, there is an evident lack of bisexual/faith research.

1.4.1 The relationship between the LGBT+ community and Christian faith

Attitudes towards the LGBT+ community differ between Christian denominations, reflecting a wide range of theological interpretations and societal perspectives. It is important to note that there is no universal stance amongst Christian denominations regarding the LGBT+ community, and individual beliefs and practices can differ even within groups. Although not the opinion of all, the Roman Catholic Church, for example, is seen as ‘notoriously anti-gay’ (Radojcic, 2016, p. 1297), with its doctrines showcasing morally and socially conservative beliefs. Whilst teaching that homosexual acts are sinful, Catholicism – in a ‘general reaffirmation of Vatican II’ (O’Brien, 2014, p. xx) - does emphasise that dignity and respect should be extended to all individuals, including those who experience same-gender attraction, calling for celibacy as the appropriate expression of their sexuality. It could be argued that the wider Anglican Communion is divided on the issue of the LGBT+ community, with some provinces affirming same-gender relationships and ordaining openly LGBT+ clergy, whilst others strictly oppose such practices (Meek, 2014, p. 103) – it should be noted that whilst these attitudes are not necessarily present within doctrine, they are widely known from lived experience. Other branches of Protestantism such as the Methodists or Baptists, especially in the UK and United States, have taken much greater steps towards inclusion and affirmation of the LGBT+ community. These denominations, whilst there is still some variation, have taken steps to allow for the ordination of openly LGBT+ clergy, perform same-gender marriage ceremonies, and advocate for equal rights and protection for LGBT+ individuals (Bethmont, 2019). It is important to remember that attitudes within these denominations can evolve over time due to ongoing theological, cultural, and societal discussions, and individuals within denominations will also hold a variety of views.

The denominational scope of this research study only goes so far as to focus on the CoFE.

However, this does not mean that when participants were sought out that a strict, lifelong adherence to the CofE was expected. As long as participants had been, or currently were, some way involved in the life of the CofE, previous or current affiliation to another Christian denomination – or even another faith – would be accepted. With this in mind, I argue having a broad understanding of other denominational attitudes towards the LGBT+ community, and marriage and relationships, will allow the beliefs of the CofE to be put into a richer context. Below, in Figure 4, a specific column has also been dedicated to whether the chosen denominations have any public stance or viewpoints on bisexuality.

Figure 4: Christian denominational attitudes towards the LGBT+ community

Much of this information has been gained from denominational websites (see baptist.org.uk; methodist.org.uk; quaker.org.uk; churchofengland.org; cbcew.org.uk), alongside wider online research into LGBT+ relationships with faith.

Denomination	Views on the LGBT+ community/homosexuality	Views on marriage/relationships	Bisexual-specific views?
Baptists	Varied outlooks, ranging from liberal to conservative. The conservative position on the LGBT+ community is held by the Baptist World Alliance (128 countries). The Association of Welcoming and Affirming Baptists adopts a liberal view and are advocates for inclusion.	Most Baptist denominations adopt a traditional view of marriage. Some denominations allow congregations to decide their own policies, with others supporting same-gender marriage (such as the Alliance of Baptists in the United States). Regional decision policies are in place in the UK regarding same-gender marriage.	<i>None found</i>
Methodists	Diverse viewpoints - there is no one denomination that represents the entirety of Methodism. The World Methodist Council has no official statement on sexuality.	The Methodist Church of Great Britain, as of 2021, allows same-gender couples to marry on Methodist premises. This movement was opposed by Methodist Evangelicals Together (evangelicalfocus.com , 2021). Same-gender marriage within Methodist groups is also permitted in other regions. Some regions allow ministers to exercise their freedom to bless same-gender unions.	<i>None found</i>
Quakers	Wide range across the world from complete acceptance to a view that homosexuality is contrary to what God intends. ‘Quakers were one of the first churches to talk openly about sexuality... We feel that the quality and depth of feeling between two people is the most important part of a loving relationship, not their gender or sexual orientation’ (Quakers in Britain, 2016)	Quakers supported and campaigned for marriage equality (in the UK) from 2009: ‘same-sex couples who are civil partners and wish subsequently to convert this to a marriage in a Quaker meeting for worship may do so where this is permitted by law’ (Quaker.org.uk, 2023)	1972: the Committee of Friends on Bisexuality issued the Ithaca Statement, which supports the bisexual community (BiMedia.org via

			web.archive.org,2023 [2015])
Anglicanism	Lambeth Conference 1998, Resolution 1.10 rejects 'homosexual practice as incompatible with Scripture' (Anglican Communion Office, 2004). An attitude of impaired communion: Anglican provinces in the Global South do not agree with actions taken by provinces within the North regarding attitudes towards the LGBT+ community. Some provinces permit the ordination of LGBT+ clergy.	Range of opinions from completely against, to blessings allowed, to marriages performed. Anglican churches in some regions have taken steps towards approving and performing same-gender marriages. Some regions do not; the Revd Justin Badi Arama of the Episcopal Church of South Sudan urged the Anglican communion to impose sanctions on provinces that allow same-sex unions (Dube, <i>for</i> eyeradio, 2023). <i>Blessings:</i> The Church of England in 2023, announced 'prayers of thanksgiving, dedication and for God's blessing for same-sex couples'.	Within the Church of England, bisexuality is referred to across texts from 1991 – 2020. Please see the literature review for further information.
Catholicism	Does not promote or condone homosexual activity. The Catechism of the Catholic Church states that 'homosexual acts are intrinsically disordered' (2019, p. 566), however, homosexuals must be accepted with respect, compassion, and sensitivity.	Denies existence and validity of same-gender marriage. Opposes same-gender marriage and same-gender civil unions. Pope Francis expressed support for same-gender civil unions in 2021 but acknowledges the Church's stance: 'Marriage is a sacrament. The church doesn't have the power to change sacraments. It's as our Lord established' (Wakefield for Pink News,2021).	<i>None found</i>

1.5 Research justifications

As previously stated, I argue that conducting a research study of this nature is imperative. Bisexuality is a truly misunderstood identity, one which requires a ‘better and richer understanding’ within the CofE (Church of England, 2023c, p. 16). Bisexuality is an identity that is yet to be publicly affirmed within a Church context, and perhaps most importantly, the damaging language within *Issues* (1991, p. 42) is yet to truly be apologised for. Whilst Bishops within the CofE have recognised that their lack of understanding surrounding identities such as bisexuality has caused hurt and pain, this apology has not extended to considering languages in documents such as *Issues*. I argue that the Church must address bisexuals misconceptions in order to foster an environment that is more welcoming and affirming to this community. Scholars of lived religion show that understanding the beliefs and experiences of individuals is vital; in lived religion, 'we look for the material, embodied aspects of religion as they occur in everyday life, in addition to listening for how people explain themselves' (Ammerman, 2014, p. 190). I argue it is particularly pertinent to pay attention to experiences that may not have a clear relationship with official religious policies, doctrines, and teachings. Individual experiences have the potential to show official documentation as outdated and out of touch with the present reality, which may go as far as promoting misunderstandings. I argue this to be the case with *Issues in Human Sexuality*.

The triangulation concept in this research framework examines the disparity between bisexual Christian lived experience and the way bisexuality is represented in Church of England publications and policies. This triangular relationship consists of three key elements: the lived experiences of bisexual Christians within the Church, the official documentation and policies that define the Church’s stance on bisexuality, and the perspectives of policy makers who influence or create these documents. The triangulation method is used to analyse the gaps between these elements, particularly

focusing on how Church policies and publications align - or fail to align - with the realities of bisexual Christians. By comparing these different perspectives, this research seeks to understand whether bisexual voices are meaningfully included in the Church's discourse, or if policy makers rely on external theological traditions, societal attitudes, or personal biases instead. Additionally, it examines how Church policies affect bisexual individuals, and whether they offer support or contribute to exclusion. This approach enhances validity by drawing from multiple sources, allowing for a deeper analysis of inconsistencies and the broader implications of the Church's engagement with bisexuality. Ultimately, by identifying these disparities, the research aims to explore ways to bridge the gap between lived experience and institutional representation, fostering greater inclusivity and understanding within the Church of England.

I provide the following reasons to justify this research study:

1.5.1 There is a lack of bisexual representation in Christianity

In theological studies and literature that focus on relationships between faith and the LGBT+ community, bisexuality will often appear on the cover of a text or in the title of a journal article and will be 'revealed' as the 'B' within LGBT+, but there is then no further representation or recognition, with the rest of the text focusing on the experiences of lesbians and gay men (see, for example, Sharpe, 2011; Jimmerson, 2017; Heie, 2018; Sanders, 2020). Bisexuals are often neglected, their presence overlooked, or their unique experiences are amalgamated with others in the LGBT+ community. Indeed, 'research exploring sexuality and Christianity has previously tended to focus on monosexuals, suggesting that the issues facing bisexual women and men are synonymous with those facing lesbians and gay men' (Toft, 2014, p. 546). Whilst I would certainly agree that growth within the field of bisexual Christian theology is positive, more can and should be done to provide a voice

for bisexual Christians.

1.5.2 Bisexuals face unique challenges, which deserve to be recognised and supported

As will be understood in the context of research, bisexuals often face unique challenges, be it dating and intimate relationships (Li *et al.*, 2013; DiDonato, 2019), coming out (Scherrer, Kazyak, and Schmitz, 2015) or, perhaps researched most thoroughly, mental health issues (Ross, Dobinson, and Eady, 2010). These unique challenges have the capability to affect bisexuals both within the wider world, and their Christian communities. Providing further research into why bisexuals face these challenges *within a faith context* could offer ministers the opportunity to develop tailored, suitable support for bisexuals, and in turn, can help inform efforts to create more inclusive and supportive communities. In areas such as mental health, where bisexuals are seen to have greater negative experiences than their homosexual or heterosexual counterparts, research can help to identify strategies for promoting good mental health and wellbeing within Christian communities.

By undertaking a research study that pays particular attention to Church publications and policy, and how these documents affect lived experience, an opportunity could be created to instigate more effective change-making and encourage the creation of inclusive publications on human sexuality, that allow bisexuals to share their voices and shape views moving forward. Research can help to inform advocacy efforts aimed at promoting acceptance and equality for bisexual individuals in Christian communities, encouraging efforts to change or reinform policies and publications that perpetuate discrimination, thus promoting education and awareness about bisexuality.

1.5.3 Understanding the complexities between faith and plurisexuality

The relationship between sexuality and religion continues to be complex, especially the

relationship between (what is often considered to be) ‘white, Western’ religion, and plurisexuality. There is often an inability within Western faith and culture to comprehend that anything can exist outside of a binary structure; in the Christian faith in particular, ‘clergy attitudes and church doctrines remain resolutely binary’ (Shepherd, 2021, p. 51). Consensual non-monogamy is common amongst plurisexuality; however, these acts can often be portrayed negatively in a religious context, markedly within Christianity, with many plurisexuality referred to as sinful for embracing (or often, assuming to embrace) multiple partners (Dworkin, 2001; Bernhardt-House, 2010; Shepherd, 2019)⁹. Therefore, I argue that conducting more research in order to comprehend the complexities that exist between faith and plurisexuality can only be beneficial, as this will allow Western faiths – distinctly, Christianity – to broaden their understandings of sexual identity, particularly sexual identities that are non-monosexual, and exist ‘outside’ of a societally-induced binary.

1.5.4 There is a lack of research into how Church literature can impact a community

Church publications often articulate beliefs, doctrine, and principles that guide a faith community. These documents serve as a reference point for members to understand the teachings of the church, ensuring a shared theological foundation. These documents can provide moral and ethical guidance, shared standards, and encourage community identity. The language of Church literature can have profound impacts, especially if this language is negative, perpetuates a stereotype, or provides guidance on how Christians should live their lives – and yet there is limited research into how this literature can impact communities. This is particularly the case for the bisexual Christian community within the CofE; I would argue bisexual Christian theology fails to acknowledge the impact that *Issues* could have, if studied in further detail. This emphasises why I argue it is imperative

⁹ This mindset is particularly prevalent in the Church of England and is noted in *Issues in Human Sexuality*. This will be discussed in further detail in the chapter of this thesis that focuses on language.

to access *Issues* within this study and to critically analyse its language and impact, so the Church can be provided with guidance on how to provide better support to the bisexual community, and to improve the language that they share.

1.6 Research overview and design

As argued throughout this introduction, I uphold the view that there is a lack of research that focuses on the relationship between lived experience and religious documentation or policy, alongside examining the gap between what is ‘thought’ within policy, and what exists within lived experience. In order to approach this issue and provide considerations for forward movement, data will be collected, and subsequently analysed, via two sets of qualitative semi-structured interviews. The first participant group will consist of bisexual Christians aged 18 – 25, and the second shall consist of clergy and academics involved in the Church’s *LLF* project. To provide an insight into Church publications for those who may not be familiar, the bisexual participants will also engage in a reading task during their individual interviews. The data collected will then be thematically coded and organised in two different ways; firstly, through organic, researcher-based thematic analysis, and secondly through computer-based software to allow for more unbiased thematic analysis.

It is the hope of this research study that the rich data which emerges will provide ways in which we can understand both the issues that bisexual Christians face, and the issues that bisexual Christians argue are important to them. This study will aim to ‘look to the future’, to consider how the gap between publication and person can be reduced, and how bisexuality can achieve a more prominent voice within the Church of England.

1.7 Thesis structure

The final section of this introduction will provide an overview of each thesis chapter. Beginning with a literature-based analysis, this thesis will then examine the research designs and methods that form this study, followed by critical data analysis of three key themes. Finally, the concluding chapter will examine how understandings of lived experience within the Church of England can be taken forward, and what this means for the bisexual community.

Chapter 2 - Review of literature: The review of literature will introduce two key theoretical frameworks within this study: lived religion, and heteronormativity. These themes will be examined in light of youth, and bisexuality, followed by an examination of the gaps that exist, and will in turn contribute to this study. To provide an insight into current understandings of Church policies and publications, the likes of *Issues* and *LLF* will be examined through both academic and social perspectives. Again, gaps within the literature that will then contribute to this study will be identified.

Chapter 3 - Research methodologies, considerations, and methods: This chapter will be broken into three parts: research methodologies, prior considerations to research methods, and research methods: ‘Research methodologies’ will focus on the theoretical frameworks that will shape this research study, alongside the analytical framework that will be used to analyse this study’s data to the best of its ability. The ‘prior considerations’ will focus on various ethical considerations examined prior to beginning this research study, both on behalf of the researcher and the wider field. As this study was conducted during a phase of the Covid-19 pandemic, the impact of said pandemic on the research will be considered here. Finally, the ‘research methods’ will discuss the step-by-step process undertaken for this study’s fieldwork, from recruiting participants, to undertaking focus groups, interviewing, transcribing, and storing and analysing data.

Chapter 4 - ‘Insulting’, ‘Troubling’, ‘Unhelpful’: Examining bisexual language in Church of England policy and publications, and how the Church can move forward: This chapter pays close attention to the CofE’s 1991 publication *Issues in Human Sexuality*, examining the impact of language from both the bisexual Christian participants and those involved in *LLF*. The chapter will be broken down by quotations from *Issues* to provide a detailed analysis into the language used, and how this can affect both those within the community, and those observing the text. Key conclusions drawn from this chapter will focus on the inability of Church language to accurately reflect the bisexual lived experience, and potential actions that can move the Church towards more inclusive and realistic language use.

Chapter 5 – Redefining space: towards an inclusive environment for bisexuality within the Church of England: This final analytical chapter will explore how the bisexual Christian and *LLF* participants believe that an ideal bisexual Christian space in the CofE can be formed. The data in this chapter is presented in light of a cyclical diagram, which explores four key elements in creating an ideal space: creating support and affirmation within the CofE, combatting misunderstandings of bisexuality within the Church, understanding bisexual wariness in Christian spaces, and creating bisexual visibility in Church spaces. Key conclusions in this chapter will focus upon how the four key elements examined can, in turn, encourage the creation of more inclusive and accepting spaces for bisexuals in the CofE, and the actions needed for this change.

Chapter 6- Between belief and desire: bisexual perspectives on marriage in the Church of England: This chapter will examine the phenomenon of marriage within the bisexual Christian community, with key focuses on heteronormativity and guilt, and the impacts that both faith and sexual identity can have when considering a Christian marriage. Key conclusions in this chapter will

consider how the Church can progress in developing understandings of, and tackling, the unique complexities that bisexuals face when considering a CofE marriage.

Chapter 7 - Concluding thoughts: looking to a hopeful future, and considering what is next for bisexuals in the Church of England: The conclusion to this thesis will discuss to what extent the research study has met its aims, how the study has contributed to the research field, and recommendations for future research. Considering the elements of language, marriage, and space, potential pastoral considerations will be provided for the Church, to again consider how to create a more welcoming environment for bisexuals within its institution.

Chapter 2

Review of Literature

The relationship between human sexuality and Christianity is complex and is often viewed as contradictory (O'Brien, 2004); due to these complexities, the CofE specifically is seen as an institution that 'does not "do" sex and sexuality' (Shepherd, 2019, p. 29). Whilst in recent years some Christian denominations have embraced same-gender marriage (Gay, Lynxwiler, and Smith, 2015; Cornwall, 2023), or extended blessings to couples who have undertaken a civil service (Bethmont, 2019), many churches continue to uphold the traditional belief that marriage should only occur between a man and a woman. Similarly, whilst some churches will openly welcome members of the LGBT+ community into their congregations, others maintain a more restrictive stance, excluding those who do not identify as heterosexual (Barbosa, Ribeiro, and Liechty, 2018; Fahs and Swank, 2021).

For bisexuals in particular, their identity is often seen as 'incompatible' with the Christian faith, with both the CofE and the Roman Catholic Church 'conceptualis[ing] bisexuality as inherently un-Christian' (Toft, 2012, p. 189). Bisexual individuals face inaccurate and derogatory stereotypes, unfairly characterised as self-indulgent individuals who are unable to manage without multiple sexual partners and are pressured to choose a singular 'side'. As one participant in Mathers, Sumerau, and Cragun's (2018, p. 941) study articulates, "you can't have all of the ice cream flavors. You have to choose one flavor". In a belief system that embraces a binary perspective on sex and gender, one which is often echoed within wider society, bisexual individuals regularly experience a sense of displacement, as they struggle to fit within the confines of this dichotomous outlook (Levy and Harr, 2018, p. 188).

Stereotypes surrounding bisexuality, particularly within faith contexts, often stem from a heteronormative outlook that defines relationships and desire within a binary framework of male and female pairings. This binary way of thinking is not only reinforced through theological interpretations but also through institutional practices that emphasise monogamous, gendered expectations in marriage and relationships, exacerbating the above suggestion that bisexuality may be inherently ‘incompatible’ with faith. Further stereotypes surrounding promiscuity, indecision, or immorality, can be reinforced by teachings that frame any non-heteronormative identity as ‘sinful’ or ‘deviant’ (Wilkinson, 2022; Chronc, 2024). Additionally, historical and cultural stigmas surrounding LGBT+ identities, combined with a lack of education or dialogue about bisexuality within religious spaces, can perpetuate these harmful stereotypes.

It is often the case that stereotypical interpretations overlook the complexities of lived religion – how individuals navigate, embody, and experience their faith in everyday life – and lived experiences, in which there is a focus on the personal, subjective experience of an individual, shaped by their social, cultural, and historical contexts. As a concept, lived religion emphasises personal and communal expressions of faith, including rituals, beliefs, and spiritual experiences that might not align neatly with formal religious teachings, and recognises that religion is not focused purely on prescribed dogma, but is shaped by people's interactions, cultural contexts, and individual interpretations. As Ammerman (2021, pp. 1 - 3) argues, religion does not just have to be about what we expect to observe; religion is found and lived in quiet, private spaces, within protest songs, on the covers of our newspapers, and within our Instagram feeds. In turn, even in societies where religion may be seen to be declining, individuals may maintain personal religious beliefs whilst distancing themselves from formal religious institutions – Davie (1994) refers to this concept as ‘believing without belonging’. Lived experience, through its understanding of social or cultural contexts, can

allow for more nuanced, empathetic and realistic understandings of how individuals or groups may respond to, or interact with, certain practices or institutions. The concepts of lived experience and lived religion are intrinsically linked, and for bisexual Christians, the intersection of these concepts is critical, as it allows us to create a space in which we aim to understand how bisexual individuals engage with their faith in everyday life, alongside how they navigate these institutional structures and practices, particularly when these structures or practices may present an outlook or ideology that hinders their visibility or ‘compatibility’. By focusing solely on doctrinal texts or official Church teachings, the nuanced ways in which bisexual Christians reconcile their faith with their sexual identity may be ignored or misunderstood. Therefore, it is crucial to prioritise both lived religion and lived experiences, acknowledging the personal testimonies, spiritual practices, and communal experiences that shape the faith journeys of bisexual individuals within the CoFE.

This study is underpinned by two key theoretical frameworks, lived religion and heteronormativity, which together provide a nuanced lens for examining the intersection of Church policies and publications, bisexual identity, and the Church of England as an institution. As noted, lived religion moves beyond official doctrine to explore how individuals practice and experience their faith in everyday life, recognising the complex, personal, and sometimes contradictory ways in which believers negotiate religious identity. This perspective is essential for understanding how bisexual Christians engage with Church teachings and institutional practices – not merely as passive recipients of doctrine, but as active agents who interpret, adapt, and sometimes resist institutional norms. As Gurevich, Bailey and Bower (2014, p. 44) simply state – ‘bisexuality unsettles – sociopolitically, discursively, psychically and, at its core, epistemically’. At the same time, heteronormativity illuminates how multiple Church policies are shaped by assumptions that privilege heterosexual relationships as the moral and theological ideal. By framing bisexuality as a challenge

to these normative structures, this study investigates how Church policies and publications enforce rigid sexual categories that fail to accommodate bisexual identities, often leading to feelings of exclusion or internal conflict. Together, these frameworks allow for a critical analysis of both institutional power and personal faith, highlighting the tensions bisexual Christians face as they navigate the relationship between their sexual and religious lives within the Church of England.

Before beginning this theoretical analysis, it should be noted that the bisexual participants in this study fell within a prescribed age bracket of 18 to 25 years old. In certain research contexts, this group would be defined as ‘youth’. Poobalan *et al* (2012, p. 640; 2014, p. 909) in their mixed-method studies of physical activity dieting refer to this age bracket as ‘young people’ who are moving through the ‘adolescence/adult transition’; Marchini *et al* (2020, p. 468) note this bracket as both ‘youth’ and ‘emerging adults’; and Mayberry *et al* (2021, p. 1249) further refer to 18-25-year-olds as ‘youth’ and ‘young adults’. In studies of religion, Jung and Park (2020, p. 430) note how ‘numerous studies have examined how individuals maintain or shift religiosity as they transit from youth to emerging adults, often referred to the ages between 18 and 25’; Young and Shipley (2014, p. 862) too recognise how religiosity can change across the life course and that youth can cover a wide age bracket, but also focus their particular research within the 18-25 bracket.

‘Youth’ can also represent multiple age brackets in further social contexts. The United Nations Member States, for example, define youth as individuals between 15 and 24 years old (definition agreed 1981, 1985; shared further 2024); the World Health Organisation (2011) often categorises young people as those between 10 and 24 years old, further breaking it down into adolescents (10–19 years) and youth (15–24 years); in social and psychological research, studies may define youth more broadly, especially when considering transitional phases into adulthood. With

these broad ranges in mind, it is critical to consider the lived religion of youth within this study, and how the experiences of queer religious youth in particular may, or may not, reflect the experiences of my participants. This nuance will be explored throughout this literature review.

2.1 Considering lived religion and lived experiences

The key theoretical focus which will start this literature review is lived religion. However, before beginning this discussion, it is vital to briefly understand the concept of lived experience. Lived experience refers to the unique and subjective experiences gained through personal involvement in, or exposure to, various situations and circumstances. It encompasses firsthand encounters, feelings, and insights that individuals accumulate as they navigate their lives. In a lived experience context, ‘individual experience is seen as unfolding within the context of social and material interactions in which a subject is engaged, and under the conditions defined by the subject’s physical state at a given moment in time’ (Dieumegard *et al.*, 2021, p. 2). In other words, lived experiences are unique phenomena that are completely distinct to the individual experiencing them, and the space and time in which these experiences are formulated. These ‘social and material interactions’ reflect the contextual, tangible ways in which individuals engage with the world around them, shaping their understandings of themselves, others, and their environment. These experiences and responses are evident within the concept of lived religion, in which an individual’s cultural contexts, material interactions, and social experiences can create spaces that allow unique navigations and embodiments of faith. Examining lived religion allows scholars to gain a richer understanding of the faith lives of religious individuals outside of the prescribed scope of doctrine or text. In particular, for those who may feel ostracised by faith groups or not recognised by the language in doctrine, examining their lives through a lived religion scope can enhance knowledge of experiences that may otherwise be dismissed.

2.1.1 What is ‘lived religion’?

Lived religion refers to how people practice, interpret, and embody their faith outside institutional or doctrinal frameworks. It is shaped by personal lived experiences, cultural contexts, and social interactions, making it unique to each individual. Ammerman (2021, p. 5) states that when scholars choose to study religion in this way, as opposed to narrowing their scope to doctrine or text, the ability is created to ‘expand our lens [...] so as to see how ideas about the sacred emerge in unofficial places. It is to include the practices of ordinary people, not just religious leaders [...] [and] it is to focus on what people are doing, as well as what they are saying’. These ordinary practices and focuses can be both embodied and material, with scholars concentrating on how people dress, eat, navigate life events, and modify their bodies – all of which are integral parts of lived experience (Ammerman, 2014, p. 1). Knibbe and Kupari (2020, p. 159) echo this concept, arguing that our understanding of the experiences of religious folk, when examined through the lens of lived religion, ‘[are] shaped through countless daily practices, habits, and patterns of social life’, creating deeper understandings, as opposed to the ‘pre-defined understandings of religion’ we create when focusing on doctrine and scripture.

McGuire (2008, pp. 11 – 12) further argues that lived religion allows us to understand personal experiences of faith in a more complex and nuanced way, through realising, simply, that ‘people change’, and that religious affiliation may not be a fixed, immovable concept in one’s life. McGuire (2008, p. 12) states that, for example, some individuals may be more active within a religious community at one stage in life, but not the next, and that others may ‘creatively adapt’ the religious practices in which they use; Rabbi Harvey Gornish (1998, no page number) refers to a similar phenomenon known as supermarket religion, denoting ‘an individual's desire to pick and choose from amongst the doctrines of his faith and then follow only those which agree with his agenda

or which grant him some meaning'. According to McGuire (2008, p. 12), 'all persons' religious practices and stories with which they make sense of their lives are always changing, adapting, and growing': how, therefore, could we ever choose to narrow our focus purely to responses to scripture or policy, and ignore the continuously changing ways in which religion is lived out?

Studies that focus upon lived religion recognise how individuals create space for religion in their daily lives or how spirituality can grow through everyday activities. These studies may recognise how certain religious individuals may be 'best defined not by ideology, but by practices' (Ammerman, 1997, p. 197), and how as humans, we may imbue spiritual or sacred meaning to everyday items, 'objects that signal and encapsulate who we are and our relatedness to something beyond ourselves' (Ammerman, 2021, p. 99). Williams' (2010, p. 258) study of recognising God in work, rest and play notes how 'people continue to make room for the sacred in their everyday lives', be it 'in offices, beaches, bedrooms, and gardens' to name but a few. One participant within this study does not so much engage with a religious institution – she 'rarely attends church' (Williams, 2010, pp. 258 - 259) – but instead experiences a relationship with God when sat on a gazebo at the boardwalk. This relationship to the sacred in an everyday space emphasises the importance of said spaces, and how the ways in which we engage with them, exist within them, and live out our faith within them are so vital to recognise; as Ammerman (2021, p. 99) argues, 'spiritual experience can be embedded in everything from mementos on a desk [...] to plaques on the wall or a favorite chair by a window'. In Ganzevoort and Roeland's (2014, pp. 91, 97) research, Maria, who took up gardening post-retirement, felt 'a certain sense of sacredness' within the act, one which gave her the opportunity to recognise the cycles of life and reflect upon, and accept, her own mortality. The authors define this act of gardening as a 'quasi religion' (p. 97), a belief system or ideology that

shares characteristics with traditional religions but does not fully qualify as one; despite this, the belief may offer moral guidance, or meaning and purpose, in a similar tone to religious faith.

It could be further argued that autobiographical experiences are also powerful tools in illustrating the concept of lived religion, as they highlight how faith is experienced and negotiated in everyday life rather than just through doctrine or teachings (Hall 1997; Ammerman, 2007; McGuire, 2008). These accounts show how religious beliefs evolve over time, shaped by personal struggles, relationships, and societal changes, and may highlight the gap(s) between official teachings and personal convictions, revealing how people modify, reject, or reinterpret religious tenets to fit their lived experiences. For example, Beeching's *Undivided* (2018, p. 5) shares the story of how the author moved from concealing her feelings, as she 'tried to impeccably do the right thing by my Christian values', to being 'freed from shame and fear [...] We become our most beautiful, powerful, irreplaceable selves when we allow our diversity to shine' (p. 278). Beeching's story is a powerful example of lived religion as it portrays faith as a deeply personal, evolving, and sometimes painful journey, with a focus on how faith is felt and embodied. The text shows that faith is not passively received but actively negotiated, as Beeching wrestles with scripture and Christian teachings in seeking to reconcile her sexuality with her Christian faith. Furthermore, Conley's *Boy Erased* (2016) offers an understanding into the often-hidden world of conversion therapy, and battles of forgiveness, both within oneself, and towards loved ones. The book explores how conversion therapy programmes embody institutional religious power, emphasising how doctrinal beliefs are put into practice in ways that deeply affect individuals' lives. Through his parent's insistence upon therapeutic practices, the memoir underscores how lived religion is not just personal but deeply social, as families act as gatekeepers of religious norms and can shape one's everyday experience and practice of faith.

I would argue that examining how individuals choose to 'live religion' through qualitative

study alongside autobiographical experiences provides a richer insight into any review of literature. An examination of lived religion, as opposed to just focusing on doctrine and text, allows a more holistic and personal understanding of a subject area and contributes unique insights that may not be captured otherwise. Incorporating these experiences into research also humanises the process, bridging a gap between the academic realm and ‘real life’. I argue that these experiences allow us to contextualise research findings, connecting research with the real world.

2.1.2 Lived religion and sexual identity

As argued within Section 2.1.1, lived religion scholarship places a key focus on the ways in which religious individuals live out their religious identities - how they engage with religious rituals, beliefs, and communities, and how, for example, they may navigate tensions between their identities and religious expectations. The latter point presented here is particularly prevalent for queer Christians, who may find their identity and the way they live out their faith to be at odds with certain doctrine or scripture. For example, much literature examining Christian identity and sexual identity often focuses on the internal negotiations that individuals must undertake in order to find a place in which their religious and sexual identities can coincide. Some lesbian, gay or bisexual Christians may experience a conflict of faith and sexual identity (Levy and Harr, 2018, p. 186) due to religious teachings (Gold and Stewart, 2011, p. 238) and ‘condemnation by mainstream faith traditions’ (Beagan and Hattie, 2015, p. 92), feeling ‘guilty’ about being lesbian, gay or bisexual (Gold and Stewart, 2011, p. 239). There may also be a lack of ‘recognition and respect’ within their local communities, due to cultural ideologies of gender, faith, and ‘public sexual identity politics’ (Ho and Hu, 2016, p. 1725).

Avishai (2020, p. 365) further argues that religious and sexual identity conflict can be

impacted by factors such as an individual's personal situation or cultural contexts, two particularly key factors that appear in discussions of lived religion. She draws upon multiple studies, which argue that factors such as 'belonging to an accepting religious denomination or congregation' and 'social and cultural capital' have the capacity to 'shape one's ability to access and implement more accepting and inclusive theological interpretations', and live out their faith in a way that aligns with their identity and values. Access to higher education and space away from home, the ability to travel, move around, and access different religious spaces or groups, will have a profound impact on the identity development of LGBT+ persons of faith, and in turn, the way that they 'live out' their religion (Avishai, 2020, p. 365).

Literature focusing on relationships between faith and sexual identity, and how queer religious folk may live out their identity, habitually focuses on Christianity, and the 'often-intense identity conflicts experienced by LGBQ Christians' (Beagan and Hattie, 2015, p. 93). Studies have been undertaken into how queer religious individuals from other faiths engage with religious life, but this research is limited. In Islam, there is only a 'small number of research studies [that] exist on Muslims and south Asian gay men' (Siraj, 2014, p. 194), perhaps due to 'Islamic discourse that nurtures and promotes the condemnation of homosexuality' (Siraj, 2014, p. 194), despite growing acceptance of LGBT+ identities in Britain. Because of this, 'certain sections of the LGBT population remain largely voiceless. Muslim lesbians, in particular, are a multiply marginalised and oppressed minority, because of their gender, ethnic and religious identity' (Siraj, 2015, p. 186). To use Siraj's language, Islam's 'condemnation' of LGBT+ identities, along with societal and cultural stereotypes and stigmas, pushes many 'LGBT Muslims [...] in[to] the closet' (Siraj, 2015, p. 186), which arguably hinders our ability to understand how queer Muslims live out their faith. However, this does not paint a full picture. Siraj (2015, p.188) argues that some Muslims have been able to 'transform[ing]

‘theological condemnation’ to a ‘theological accommodation’ through alternative interpretations of the Qur’an, and the ‘establishment of inclusive mosques’ (p. 189) has created spaces for LGBT+ Muslims to navigate, express, and live out their sexual identities in a progressive faith context.

In Buddhism, Page and Yip (2021, p. 381) argue that whilst there are ‘proscriptions against homosexual activity’, as emphasised by the Dalai Lama’s beliefs that ‘homosexual acts [are] ‘improper’’, Buddhist teachers such as Thích Nhất Hạnh stress more “‘progressive” view[s] on sexuality’ (p. 382). For young Buddhists, therefore, a capacity to live out one’s faith and sexual identity together is supported through ‘forms of Buddhism that cohere[d] with broader gender and sexual equality world views’ (p. 382). In Judaism, the ‘emphasis on “traditional” gender roles, the “nuclear family”, procreation, and conservative religious values’ (Schnoor, 2006, p. 43), alongside the ‘twin threat of negative attitudes towards LGBTQ individuals and anti-Semitism’ (Faulkner and Hecht, 2011, p. 830) means that many LGBT+ Jews often struggle to live out their dual identity through an overshadow of familial and textual values. Faulkner and Hecht’s (2011, p. 836) study into LGBT+ Jews shares that some Jews undertake a ‘shifting or altering of personal labels’, which offers a freedom to navigate aspects of their lives and identity comfortably and choose in which social contexts to be ‘out’, and to what extent, as queer and/or Jewish. For others, they took particular efforts to consider which aspects of their identity come first, e.g., am I a Jewish queer or a queer Jew? and what this means for oneself (p. 841).

As seen in the examples above, there are various ways in which queer religious individuals may choose to live out their religious identity. To consider this further, some individuals may choose to seek out more welcoming religious spaces or denominations. For example, in the Christian faith, individuals ‘who do not want to reject either their religious or sexual identity often seek out

denominations or churches that have explicit welcoming stances towards sexual minorities, such as the Metropolitan Community Church (MCC) or the United Church of Christ (UCC)' (Woodell, Kazyak, and Compton, 2015, p. 860). As sexuality and religion are often seen as 'incompatible' (Toft, 2014, p.547), individuals may choose to seek out solace in congregations that provide a 'climate of queer acceptance' (Dobbs, 2000, p. 59), giving them the opportunity to best explore how to live out their dual identities. Others may choose to keep a relationship with God, without maintaining a relationship with a religious body (Gold and Stewart, 2011, p. 239). They may also choose to exercise a more spiritual outlook on faith, as opposed to affiliating themselves with a particular denomination. By keeping a relationship with faith but moving away from the institutionalised structures and doctrines that come with organised religions, LGBT+ individuals are given the freedom to 'do' faith in a manner that is comfortable to them.

2.1.2a Lived religion and bisexuality

Bisexuality can often be hidden in discussions of lived religion and sexual identity, due to the fact that bisexual experiences are often stated to be 'synonymous with those facing lesbians and gay men' (Toft, 2014, p. 546). Section 2.2 of this review discusses heteronormativity, where Toft's statement will be discussed in further detail. Despite this claim, there are some studies which focus upon the religious identity of bisexuals, and how they live out their faith. Toft (2012, pp. 189 – 191) provides various examples of how bisexual Christians have supported themselves in this process. For example, some individuals, instead of basing their religious identity around the specific doctrines of a denomination or religious institution, will instead create a stronger sense of self. For some, this understanding of self 'plays a far greater role than church authority as the basis of the respondents' Christian faith' (Yip, 2003, p. 136). For those whose sexuality is so often misunderstood by churches due to its inability to fit into a binary box, developing a sense of self can be highly beneficial for

bisexual Christian identity navigation and living out one's faith. In her personal essay on religion and sexual identity, Carter (2017, p. 153) considers the balance between having God's approval of her sexuality, alongside having her own sense of approval:

'When I think about God, as I am sometimes wont to do, I ask myself whether belief in him would require me to assume he disapproved. I think the answer is no. No, because what I have discovered is *self*: it is growth, love, the beauty of the individual, warm caresses and happiness, something that feels so right and simple and natural'.

For some bisexual Christians, developing this sense of self allows them to do what they believe to be the 'right thing'. This may involve leaving a particular church or group, or for others, as with Angela, this could be creating a distance between both sides of one's sexuality, to live authentically in both identities: 'In order to find and express the authentic self, Angela denied herself sexual relationships in her desire to do the right thing, to live authentically, which at this time was according to the religious worldview of her upbringing' (Fielder and Ezzy, 2018, p. 70). Bisexual Christians may also choose to move away from ascribed worship, practicing religious flexibility and adapting their faith to suit their needs (Toft, 2012, pp. 189 - 191). Wilcox (2003, p. 56) refers to this as the 'biblical buffet', where Christians can – according to one such participant in her research – “take from the Bible what I can use, and disregard a lot of what I can't use”.

For the bisexual community, this 'pick and mix' approach to Christianity may provide them with – for example - the comfort of scripture or a relationship with God, without feeling the need to attend a church or worship group, as there may be the potential of facing unwelcoming congregants. For Carter (2017, p. 149) separating herself from a religious institution, whilst still keeping an inner relationship with God, allowed her to build a stronger understanding of both her sexual and religious identities: 'I had to follow what felt right for me, without the guidelines of religion or the stereotypes

of society interfering’. Some bisexual Christians may go as far as to move away from faith altogether, holding on to a Christian identity, or a sense of love and community that has been built from Christian faith, without engaging with the faith itself:

‘God and Christianity – though not the church institution per se – were an integral part of my life for so long [...] I hold two parts in suspension now: the one that cannot honestly worship or participate in religious community anymore, who sees the many flaws of the social philosophies that tend to accompany mainline Christianity. But there’s another part of me that felt love there, that felt meaning; who still believes we are more than just bodies living purposeless lives, who still prays sometimes when she is frightened or grieving’ (Carter, 2017, p. 148).

2.1.3 Lived religion and youth

As seen thus far, there are multiple groups that embody the concept of lived religion by interpreting and practicing their faith in ways that differ from traditional institutional forms. One such other group is religious youth, whose reinterpretation of living out faith is creating a generational shift. ‘Youth is generally seen as a time of exploring religious identity and beginning to make one’s own decisions in relation to religious practices’ (Young and Shipley, 2014, p. 861), and religious youth are seen to engage with their religious identity, and present this identity within the lived realm, in such a way that represents more than just a focus on doctrine and institution. In 2022, the Springtide Research Institute shared that, despite common misconceptions that young people – with a focus here on ‘Gen Z’ (1997 – 2012) – are moving away from faith and spirituality, many young people do ‘consider themselves religious or spiritual – just not tied to an institution’. This argument is present in the research of Collins-Mayo (2012, p. 85), who state that ‘religiously active youth’ are often drawn to religious expressions that afford them the ability to have ‘an authentic and personal relationship with God that is not curtailed by a religious institution’. A lack of want, or feeling a need to, label themselves as part of a particular denomination was also emphasised through religious

practice, with ‘more than half of young people say[ing] they never or rarely attend a religious service, but [...] engage at least weekly in a few activities they consider religious or spiritual practices, including engaging in or with art (53%), praying (45%), reading (45%), or being in nature (40%)’ (Springtide Research Institute, 2022). This variation in practice underpins how faith can intertwine with aspects of everyday lived experience.

Murniasih and Sabina (2024, p. 272) further recognise that, for ‘Gen Z’ in particular, a rapid expansion in digital technology has changed the way in which youth ‘express[ed], question[ed] and reshape[d]’ their religious identities. Whilst for many older generations, their ‘cognitive development’ and ‘faith formation[s]’ (Gale, 2024, p. 4) happened in early childhood, and therefore before the rise in social media usage, for younger generations, their experience of social media has been from a young age, classifying them as ‘digital natives’ (Moberg *et al.*, 2019, p. 240). Social platforms can be used as a ‘primary means of social interaction, including religious and spiritual engagements’ (Murniasih and Sabina, 2024, p. 272), although this can have negative consequences as well as positive. The social digital world, within which youth are given the opportunity to share so much of their own lived experience, as well as engage with the experiences of others, also provides key opportunities to recognise the lived religion of those who may express their faith in non-traditional ways. Alongside social interactions, online platforms allow youth to explore diverse spiritual beliefs and practices beyond traditional religious institutions. These platforms provide spaces for ‘sharing [their] faith on social media’ (Youthscape, 2022, p. 19) or as a source of religious education, with users having the capacity to follow influencers or sites that may provide information and explanations about various spiritual concepts (Carrow-Boyd, 2013). The online world has become an integral part of how youth interact with religion; for some young people, engaging with faith through online means may be the most accessible, or the safest, way in which to build and live

out a religious identity.

One such area which is particularly prevalent in the lives of religious youth is sexuality. In line with the World Health Organisation's (2006) definition, 'sexuality' in this instance does not just refer to sexual identity, but to sex, relationships, and marriage¹⁰. For many religious youth, sexuality 'often assumes a prominent role as young adults gain deeper understandings of themselves as well as interpersonal connections. This prominence is partly due to the increasing sexualisation and prevalence of the media in contemporary culture, particularly youth culture' (Yip, Keenan, and Page, 2011, p. 10). Young people's faith often provides guidelines on sexual behaviour, emphasising concepts like purity and commitment, but also – in some cases – stressing messages of immorality; as Cooksey and Doom (2011, p. 105) state, the scaremongering message of 'sex before marriage is a sin' is 'commonly associated with religious voices when questions arise concerning young people, their sexual attitudes and behaviours'. Religious youth uphold a variety of attitudes towards sexuality: some may choose to abstain from sex until marriage as an expression of their devotion to their beliefs and to honour the sanctity of marriage. Others may see marriage as a sacred covenant, essential for building a family and fulfilling religious obligations. For some, scriptural commands surrounding abstaining from sex before marriage may seem outdated in a modern world, where sex and sexuality are much more open and varied conversations. This is echoed in Yip, Keenan and Page's (2011) study of religion, youth, and sexuality, where participants (aged between 18 and 25) shared various sexual behaviours and attitudes, from 'casual sex is detrimental to one's well-being' (58.1% of respondents), to 'sex could be fulfilling outside marriage, as long as it is within a loving

¹⁰ Sexuality: '...a central aspect of being human throughout life encompasses sex, gender identities and roles, sexual orientation, eroticism, pleasure, intimacy and reproduction. Sexuality is experienced and expressed in thoughts, fantasies, desires, beliefs, attitudes, values, behaviours, practices, roles and relationships. While sexuality can include all of these dimensions, not all of them are always experienced or expressed. Sexuality is influenced by the interaction of biological, psychological, social, economic, political, cultural, legal, historical, religious and spiritual factors'.

context’ (56.9%) and ‘Sexual experimentation should be part of young adulthood’ (28.8%) (pp. 10 – 11).

Religious youth will, undoubtedly, have had their views on sexuality shaped by the doctrine and teachings of their faith. However, it should be considered that religious youth may also seek to navigate their sexuality beyond doctrinal teachings or religious institutions; indeed, Yip, Keenan and Page’s (2011, p. 13) emphasised a general lack of understanding within religious communities when it came to sexuality, with only ‘38.9% of participants agree[ing] or strongly agree[ing] that ‘My religion understands the issues lesbian, gay and bisexual people face’’, and ‘small majority of the participants considered their priests or religious leaders knowledgeable about sexuality in general’. Therefore, youth may turn to a variety of sources for guidance, understanding, and personal exploration. Some may engage with peers or parents and carers (Yip, Keenan, and Page, 2011, p. 13) to create a space in which to challenge, refine, or affirm their perspectives, whereas other youth may access social media, blogs, books, or speak to healthcare professionals (Hollis *et al.*, 2022, p. 8) to explore questions about relationships, intimacy, and marriage in ways that align with both their values and lived experiences. In interfaith or multicultural settings, exposure to different religious and cultural perspectives on sex and marriage may encourage a more nuanced or flexible approach to their own beliefs. Through these varied avenues, young people can critically engage with ideas of sexuality while still maintaining a connection to their faith.

The above then leads us to consider: how might the experiences of queer religious youth differ from their heterosexual peers when navigating sexuality within faith communities? In what ways do queer religious youth reconcile their identities with religious teachings that may not fully affirm or acknowledge them? How do queer religious youth seek support or alternative sources of guidance when facing potential exclusion or misunderstanding within their faith traditions?

2.1.3a Lived religion for queer religious youth

Queer religious youth often experience a unique form of lived religion, as they may navigate both their faith and their identity in ways that may not align with traditional teachings or institutional structures. Some may develop personal and flexible interpretations of religious texts, finding inclusive theological perspectives, or engage with affirming faith communities that support their identities. “In, by and for” congregations such as the Metropolitan Community Church (Taylor, 2016, p. 42) aim to ‘reconcile the different, and at times conflicting, identities of its members – as well as the approaches of more ‘traditional’ churches’ through use of ‘age appropriate’ and contemporary music. Taylor (2016, p. 61) also argues that queer religious youth argue that online platforms such as Facebook ‘can offer safe spaces [...] to construct an identity, forge connections, and articulate voices otherwise subjugated in some offline spaces’. This allows queer religious youth to maintain a spiritual connection whilst affirming their sexuality, without feeling the need to adhere strictly to doctrine or text.

In reconciling their queer identities with religious teachings, some young people adopt a more experiential approach to faith, prioritising personal relationships with the divine, such as Stephanie, who built a better relationship with her faith through singing in a choir (Taylor, 2016, p. 49). For others, a ‘blurring’ (Toft, 2014, p. 557) of the lines between faith and sexuality through engaging with celibacy or ‘same-sex friendships’ allowed bisexual Christians to take power away from ‘official Church standpoints’ and in turn, create a comfortable compatibility between faith and sexuality (Toft, 2014, p. 557).

Queer religious youth navigate the intersection of faith and identity in diverse and personal

ways, often reinterpreting traditional teachings to create a more inclusive and affirming spiritual experience. Whether through engagement with affirming congregations, online spaces, or personal spiritual practices like music and same-sex friendships, they find ways to reconcile their beliefs with their identities. By prioritising lived experiences and personal connections with the divine, they challenge rigid institutional standpoints and carve out spaces where both faith and sexuality can coexist harmoniously.

2.1.4 Section summary

A key gap in the existing literature lies in the disparity between lived religion and institutional church policies, particularly regarding how these policies shape, restrict, or challenge the everyday religious experiences of bisexual individuals. Whilst much scholarship focuses on lived religion as a means of personal negotiation and adaptation beyond institutional constraints, there is less attention given to the structural limitations imposed by official church policies and how these affect bisexual individuals differently from their lesbian and gay counterparts. The Church of England, for example, often maintains policies that reinforce binary understandings of sexuality and relationships, which can leave bisexual individuals feeling unacknowledged or forced to conform to rigid categories that do not reflect their experiences. Additionally, discussions on lived religion frequently highlight how individuals modify or selectively engage with doctrine, but there is less critical engagement with how church policies actively create barriers to full participation in religious life. For bisexual Christians, this gap is particularly significant, as they may face unique forms of invalidation within religious spaces, not only due to broader societal misconceptions about bisexuality but also due to the Church's failure to accommodate non-binary expressions of sexual identity. Future research should critically examine how these institutional policies shape the lived religious experiences of bisexual individuals, considering the extent to which the Church's teachings on marriage and sexuality reinforce

exclusionary narratives or, conversely, how individuals resist, reinterpret, or navigate around these policies to sustain their faith. Addressing this gap would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the intersection between church doctrine, lived religion, and bisexual identity, shedding light on the nuanced ways in which faith communities either support or hinder the religious belonging of bisexual individuals.

2.2 Heteronormativity

Heteronormativity, a key concept in gender and sexuality studies, refers to the social, cultural, and institutional structures that assume and privilege heterosexuality as the ‘normal’ and ‘preferred’ sexual orientation (Harris and White, 2018, p. 403). Coined by Michael Warner in his text *Fear of a Queer Planet* (1993), heteronormativity is critiqued as an assumption that heterosexuality is the default, natural, or superior form of sexuality; that in its broadest forms, ‘humanity and heterosexuality are synonymous’ (Warner, 1993, p. xxiii), and therefore the societal default. Warner argues that heteronormativity is not just about individual sexual preferences but is embedded in social, political, and institutional structures, shaping laws, cultural norms, and the way in which we think about relationships, family, and the societies we live within.

The roots of heteronormativity can be found in Gayle Rubin's notion of the ‘sex/gender system’ and Adrienne Rich's notion of compulsory heterosexuality. In *The Traffic in Women* (1975), Rubin argues that societies structure sexuality and gender through kinship systems, which regulate and control relationships by defining acceptable sexual and familial arrangements (pp. 41 – 42). Drawing from the work of Lévi-Strauss, Rubin highlights how these systems operate through the exchange of women, treating them as commodities to forge alliances between men, thereby institutionalising male dominance and emphasising the subordination of women (p. 47). This is

further stressed through her argument of the ‘sex/gender system’, the cultural mechanisms that transform biological sex into social inequality and oppresses not only women but also non-normative sexualities, as it constructs heterosexuality as the norm whilst stigmatising and marginalising those who deviate from it. In *Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence* (1980), Rich introduces the concept of ‘compulsory heterosexuality’, arguing that heterosexuality is imposed on women through social structures, limiting their autonomy and relationships with other women, including expressions of same-sex desire (p. 11). Rich too challenges the subordination of women, critiquing the idea that women are ‘naturally’ heterosexual; instead, she argues that women are coerced into heterosexuality through a variety of means, including economic dependence, cultural norms, violence, and psychological conditioning (p. 16)

Heteronormativity can be recognised within various social structures and can impact them in significant ways. One such example is family structures, which are often built around the assumption that heterosexual relationships, or the ‘nuclear family’, are the ‘universal norm’ (Romero, 2024, p. 2014). This leads to pressure for individuals to conform to a heterosexual relationship model, affecting key milestones from marriage to child-rearing. Focusing on the milestone of marriage, heteronormative frameworks within institutions such as law and policy, for example, often assume heterosexual marriage as the standard for benefits and leading to a marginalisation of non-heterosexual partnerships and a formation of discriminatory practices, such as the denial of same-sex marriage rights (Johnson, 2002, p. 318). Though this has changed in many places since Johnson’s claim, heteronormativity can still be pervasive in situations where equal rights are legally embedded, such as same-gender marriage. Therefore, same-gender couples may find themselves facing implicit biases, where their partnership is still seen as an ‘other’, or less valid compared to heterosexual marriages. Due to heterosexual presentation in media and social narratives, same-gender couples

might struggle to find themselves equally represented in cultural symbols of marriage, such as weddings, engagement parties, or material objects marketed for upcoming nuptials, which are often constructed around heteronormative ideals of ‘bride’ and ‘groom’ (Kimport, 2012). Same-gender couples may still encounter pressure to conform to these norms, such as adopting gendered roles in their wedding or in family planning, even when their relationship does not fit these predefined moulds.

The above consideration of family structures is one of the many ways in which those who identify as non-heterosexual may find themselves at odds with imposed societal norms. Berlant and Warner (1998, p. 554) accentuate this argument, and stress that heteronormativity should be recognised as more than just a ‘prejudice, or phobia’ against certain minority identities:

‘Heteronormativity is more than ideology, or prejudice, or phobia against gays and lesbians; it is produced in almost every aspect of the forms and arrangements of social life: nationality, the state, and the law; commerce; medicine; and education; as well as in the conventions and affects of narrativity, romance, and other protected spaces of culture’.

However, this is of course not to say that heteronormativity’s predisposition towards minority identities should be ignored. Indeed, heteronormativity is intrinsically linked with concepts such as homophobia – an ‘individual dislike of or prejudice towards gay men or lesbian women’ (Harris and White, 2018, p. 409) – and heterosexism – ‘prejudiced attitudes, mistreatment, and discriminatory practices that are directed at people who are disadvantaged by imbalances of power in society on the basis of their sexuality’ (Harris and White, 2018, p. 404). The effects of heteronormativity on queer individuals are often described as reinforcing heterosexual or ‘straight’ privilege (the latter term here is used frequently within and towards the bisexual community, and will be discussed further in

Section 2.2.2). Warner (1993, pp. 108, 201). further critiques how heteronormativity relegates queerness to the private sphere while maintaining heterosexuality as the default mode of public life. This suggests that queer identities and relationships are often invisible or only tolerated as long as they remain outside of public institutions like marriage, family, and religion.

Heteronormativity is a particularly pervasive factor within the lives of bisexuals, and arguably, is equally prevalent to those with a faith identity, with heteronormative ideals existing as much within faith circles as in wider society. However, it would not be possible to discuss heteronormativity in the bisexual community without focusing on the effects of heteronormativity for the lesbian and gay communities also. With this in mind, whilst this research does focus particularly on bisexuality and therefore will naturally focus more on this identity over lesbian and gay identities, this is not to in any way discredit the experiences of the lesbian and gay communities, and as will be shown later throughout this review, the experiences of lesbian and gay Christians. In a faith-based world that may still stigmatise and condemn them, their openness contributes considerably to research and broader understanding and their courage in sharing their experiences is significant. Through both qualitative and quantitative research, we gain valuable insights into these lives. However, there is an emerging pattern, which will become obvious within this review; one which highlights an imbalance in the presentation of bisexual experiences when juxtaposed with those of lesbians and gay men, which will be highlighted throughout the following sections.

2.2.1 Heteronormativity and queer communities

Heteronormativity deeply impacts the queer community by marginalising identities and relationships that fall outside of this framework. It reinforces societal expectations around gender roles, relationships, and family structures, often leading to exclusion, discrimination, and internalised

shame. This can manifest in various ways, from lack of representation in media and education, to barriers within healthcare and religious communities. Within education, young people may find that their queer identities are not normalised by peers, leading to bullying and exclusion. In Harris *et al*'s (2023, p. 9) study of six secondary schools in southern England, participants reported 'little acceptance of who they were from either individuals or groups of students' being told, for example, that being gay is 'disgusting', that if they were 'any other gender [than male or female]' their identity was 'not real', and that being queer goes against faith (Harris *et al*, 2023, p. 9). These attitudes are rooted in heteronormative ideals, arguably which are pervasive in British education due to the looming overhang of Section 28 and recent public debates surrounding gender identity. In media, Anderson and Roth (2020, p. 75) argue that queer identities are consistently erased online, 'from censoring content as 'objectionable' to blacklisting keywords and restricting users' advertising revenue'. In films and on television, queer characters can often be reduced to harmful stereotypes, such as – for example – a flamboyant gay best friend or predatory queer villain or exist only as a token presence without meaningful storylines (Raley and Lucas, 2008; Shugart, 2010; Seif, 2017). Tokenism and one-dimensional stereotypes enforce a dominance of heterosexual narratives and implies that queer identities are only acceptable in a supporting or comedic role rather than as central, normalised aspects of human experience. By restricting queer representation to narrow stereotypes, media upholds the expectation that heterosexuality is the primary or 'correct' way to exist.

The practice of 'coming out' for queer individuals can also be linked to heteronormativity, due to the societal expectation that, by default, everyone is heterosexual and cisgender. This expectation therefore dictates that queer people must actively disclose their identities in a way that heterosexual and cisgender individuals do not; this 'heteronormative imperative that can put enormous pressure on non-heterosexual people to actually confess their non-heterosexuality to live

a healthy life' (Maliepaard, 2018, p. 163). The concept of coming out exists largely because heteronormativity renders queer identities invisible or 'deviant' unless explicitly stated. This creates pressure on LGBT+ individuals to announce their identities, often repeatedly, in different spaces and situations. The process of coming out can be stressful, as it involves navigating potential rejection, discrimination, or even danger in environments that privilege heterosexuality. Torres and Rodrigues (2021, p. 664) argue that individuals who navigate the coming-out process within heteronormative contexts 'experience greater isolation, stigmatisation, and violence [...] integrate negative societal views about sexuality as part of their sexual identity [...] and experience greater internalised homonegativity'. Moreover, heteronormativity often frames coming out as a necessary step to authenticity or integration, reinforcing the idea that being queer is something that must be declared rather than naturally assumed. For example, bisexual individuals often 'come out in order to be honest, feel authentic, find support and acceptance, and become more visible as bisexual' (Hayfield, 2021, p. 107). Lastly, heteronormativity and faith are intrinsically linked. The relationship between heteronormativity and religious communities is complex, as many religious traditions historically reinforce heterosexuality as the normative way of being. Many mainstream religious teachings have traditionally upheld binary gender roles and heterosexual marriage as sacred, often framing queerness as unnatural or sinful, therefore contributing to the marginalisation of LGBT+ individuals within religious spaces. This will be examined further in Section 2.2.3.

Bisexuality, as an identity that spans attraction to multiple genders, is particularly affected by heteronormativity. The societal dominance of heterosexual relationships often erases the visibility of bisexual individuals (Hayfield, 2021, p. 3), who may face unique challenges in navigating both heteronormative and queer spaces. Within a heteronormative society, bisexuality is frequently invalidated or misunderstood, either through stereotypes that suggest bisexual people are confused

or simply seeking attention, or through the assumption that they will eventually settle into a heterosexual or gay identity (Barker and Langridge, 2008; Hayfield, 2021). This pressure to conform to binary gender norms is rooted in a system that privileges heterosexuality and marginalises sexual fluidity, making it difficult for bisexual people to have their identities fully recognised or accepted. Moreover, in many cases, bisexual individuals may feel they are caught between two worlds – dismissed by both the straight and gay communities for not fully adhering to one category. This reinforces the notion that heteronormative relationships are the default, making it harder for bisexual individuals to express their identity freely without fear of discrimination or misrepresentation.

2.2.2 Heteronormativity for the bisexual community

Bisexual-based scholarship often focuses on areas such as mental health (Persson and Pfaus, 2015; Barker, 2015; Flanders, Dobinson, and Logie, 2017), bisexual erasure (Yoshino, 2000; Pennasilico, 2019; Kirby, Merritt and Kaiser, 2020), bisexuality in media (Alexander, 2011; Johnson, 2016; Corey, 2017), social perceptions, for example, bi-negative beliefs that bisexuals are hypersexual (Barak, 2019; Rodríguez, 2022), and differing attitudes towards bisexuality from both the heterosexual and queer communities (Weiss, 2004; Barker and Langridge, 2008). In other areas, bisexuality is often studied alongside the experiences of other members of the LGBT+ community, but in many cases, is then relegated to a back seat, ‘ignored by academics, historians, and various queer communities’ (Anderlini-D’Onofrio and Alexander, 2014, p. 2).

As an identity, bisexuality is seen as a ‘disrup[tor] [to] the dominant sexual binary’ (Ault, 1996, p. 449), one which ‘challenges the [...] logic around which modern cultural notions of sexuality are organized, particularly the homo/hetero divide that structures heteronormativity’ (Anderlini-D’Onofrio and Alexander, 2014, p. 1). Heteronormativity relies on a clear divide between

heterosexual and homosexual identities, reinforcing the idea that people are either straight or gay. Bisexuality disrupts this binary by acknowledging that sexual attraction can be fluid and exist across genders, destabilising fixed categories of sexual orientation.

Because bisexual individuals can be in relationships that appear heterosexual (such as when dating someone of a different gender) or homosexual (when dating someone of the same gender), society often erases bisexuality by assuming a person is straight or gay based on their current partner. This erasure reinforces heteronormativity by pressuring bisexual individuals to conform to one of the two dominant categories. One such example of this was in 2013, when Olympic diver Tom Daley announced he was dating a man (whilst also announcing that yes, he was still attracted to women). Many media platforms in the UK praised him for his bravery in sharing such an intimate part of himself, whilst living such a high-profile life. Unfortunately, whilst most newspapers were quick to praise, they were also quick to label Daley as a homosexual, despite his declaration that he still ‘fancied’ girls. When Daley married his male partner four years later, ‘many took it as the final piece of evidence for Daley’s homosexuality’ (Magrath, Cleland, and Anderson, 2017, p. 301) – despite Daley never referring to himself as homosexual. In one fell swoop, the British tabloids completely erased Daley’s bisexual identity, perhaps in favour of what they deemed a more ‘suitable’ or understandable identity. How could young bisexuals be affected by seeing Daley’s experience in the news? In the early 2010s, Daley was a household name, a British icon; even for those who may not have held an interest in Olympic diving, he was a well-known figure. When seeing bisexual erasure happen to individuals that we know, and we respect, in a public context as opposed to an academic forum, does this encourage us to rethink the way we approach the bisexual identity, and how our actions affect those who identify as bisexual?

In 2022, a similar event unfolded. The television show *Heartstopper* was a renowned success, providing relatable stories of coming out, navigating identity struggles, alongside teenage friendship issues and family relationships. Kit Connor, the actor who plays the bisexual character Nick Nelson, revealed on Twitter that he himself was bisexual, but had only shared this aspect of his personal life because he felt forced to do so. Connor, who was 18 at the time, tweeted “‘I’m bi. Congrats for forcing an 18-year-old to out himself. I think some of you missed the point of the show. Bye.’” (bbc.co.uk, 2022). Connor’s tweet, much like the articles discussing Daley’s ‘homosexuality’, highlights the issues of speculation that bisexuals so often face, exacerbated by the misassumption that bisexuality is a transitory state. Connor stated that ‘it feels a bit strange to make assumptions about a person’s sexuality just based on hearing their voice or seeing their appearance’, arguing that these actions are ‘problematic’ (bbc.co.uk, 2022). Connor was also accused of ‘queerbaiting’, a term that originated as a critique of television or other productions that teased the possibility of a queer romantic partnership between otherwise textually heterosexual characters. In the case of Connor, this term was unnecessarily used when he was seen holding hands with a female actress. Nine years apart, I would argue that both of these lived experiences, ones that are perhaps much closer to home than we would expect, highlight the consistent questioning that bisexuals face surrounding their identities, questioning that is exacerbated by a heteronormative expectation to conform. For those who admire Daley or Connor, what could this mean for them, to see such a high-profile athlete or an up-and-coming actor have their identities erased in this way? Whilst it cannot be commented on as to whether this erasure caused some kind of identity crisis for Daley or Connor, it could certainly be argued that it could have done for those out of the spotlight. Robyn Ochs (1996, p. 217) argues that biphobia exists as ‘bisexuals are frequently viewed by gay and lesbian-identified individuals as possessing a degree of privilege not available to gay men and lesbians, and are viewed by many heterosexuals as amoral, hedonistic spreaders of disease and disruptors of families’, all viewpoints which could cause serious

struggles to bisexuals in today's society.

Discussions of heteronormativity in relation to the bisexual community also lead us to consider the concept of 'straight passing', or heterosexual, privilege. The link between heteronormativity and heterosexual privilege for bisexuals lies in the way society structures relationships and identities around a rigid heterosexual framework. Heterosexual privilege refers to the advantages bisexual individuals may experience when they are in relationships that appear heterosexual such as, for example, a bisexual woman married to a man. The concept of 'passing' can be considered in many ways; Nelson (2024, p. 307) calls on the definition of Conrad and Crawford (1998), in which a passing 'actor' possesses a 'secret knowledge'. They argue that 'by Conrad and Crawford's logic, this dominating expectation of heterosexuality would lead bi+ people to be in the possession of a 'secret knowledge' due to the heteronormative audience'; in order to shed this privilege of passing, a bisexual individual would therefore have to declare their identity to everyone they meet, a feat often not required by other – particularly monosexual – identities. Whilst this 'privilege' may allow bisexuals to avoid the overt discrimination or exclusion that openly queer couples face, it is deeply tied to heteronormative structures and comes with its own costs. For example, society often assumes that a person's sexuality is determined by their current partner (Arriaga and Parent, 2019, p. 383), an assumption exacerbated by the binary structures imposed by heteronormativity. In turn, this leads to the erasure of bisexuality as a valid identity, with many bisexuals seen as hetero- or homosexual dependent upon their partner's gender identity. For some bisexuals, this may lead to 'imposter syndrome', where a bisexual will question if they are 'queer enough' (Barker *et al.*, 2012, p. 14). In turn, returning to heteronormative expectations for coming out, bisexuals may then feel a pressure to 'prove' their identity (Cipriano, Nguyen, and Holland, 2023) in a society that sees bisexuality as temporary, confusing, or even invalid. Bisexual individuals often navigate a difficult space where they

may benefit from certain aspects of heteronormativity while simultaneously experiencing its pressures, erasure, and limitations.

The relationship between heteronormativity and faith will be discussed further in Section 2.2.3, however, it is important to recognise the intrinsic relationship between bisexuality, faith, and heteronormativity. Heteronormativity influences the way bisexual people experience their own identities. Some may feel pressure to ‘choose a side’, especially in religious or traditional settings where bisexuality is seen as indecisive, promiscuous, or invalid. This pressure can lead to internalised biphobia, where bisexual individuals struggle to validate their own identities in a world that often demands a fixed orientation. Many life events within a faith context have historically been structured around heteronormative expectations, with one particular example being marriage. Bisexual individuals who choose to marry someone of a different gender may find themselves perceived as conforming to heterosexual norms, even if they still identify as bisexual. Conversely, those who marry someone of the same gender may face the same challenges as gay individuals in religious institutions that do not fully accept same-sex relationships. The idea that marriage is between one man and one woman aligns with a binary view of sexuality, leaving bisexual people feeling invisible or forced into predefined roles.

2.2.3 Heteronormativity in Christianity

Heteronormativity has been deeply embedded in Christian teachings, shaping doctrines, traditions, and expectations around gender and sexuality for centuries. Many Christian denominations uphold the belief that marriage is a sacred, divinely ordained covenant between one man and one woman, often citing biblical passages such as Genesis 2:24 and Ephesians 5:31 to reinforce this view. This rigid framework positions heterosexuality not just as the norm but as the only legitimate

expression of love and partnership within Christian life. As a result, LGBT+ identities, particularly bisexuality, which challenges binary understandings of attraction, are often erased, ignored, or deemed incompatible with Christian morality.

The influence of heteronormativity extends beyond doctrine into the daily experiences of believers. Sermons, premarital counselling, and community expectations within churches frequently assume heterosexual desire and relationships as universal, leaving little room for those whose experiences do not fit this mould. Such pressures contribute to feelings of isolation, shame, and spiritual dissonance, as individuals struggle to reconcile their faith with an identity that challenges the Church's heteronormative structure. Whilst some progressive Christian communities are working toward greater inclusion, mainstream theological discourse and institutional policies continue to centre heterosexuality as the default, making it difficult for certain Christians to find acceptance and affirmation within their religious traditions. For bisexuals, this can result in a profound sense of invisibility, as their capacity for attraction to multiple genders is often misunderstood. If a bisexual person enters a heterosexual marriage, they may be pressured to suppress or deny their full identity to align with the Church's expectations. Equally, if they pursue a same-gender relationship, they may be met with rejection from their faith community. This binary thinking forces bisexual Christians into an impossible choice: either conform to a restrictive vision of marriage and faith or risk alienation from a spiritual home that may be deeply meaningful to them.

2.2.4 Heteronormative ideals in Scripture and Church publications: considering biblical understandings of 'homosexuality'

Human sexuality and the Bible uphold a complex and multi-faceted relationship, one which has been the subject of significant debate and interpretation over the years. According to Khan (2007, p.

362), ‘the Bible [...] is the most translated book in the world. [...] As translating inevitably involves interpretation through a historical as well as a current lens, there is much debate about how the scripture is read’. Cultural and spiritual differences mean that the Bible is interpreted in vastly different ways across the world on a range of biblical ‘issues’, including human sexuality. More conservative Christian groups have selected ‘biblical phrases from Leviticus’, alongside references to the story of Sodom, in order to ‘justify the prohibition of the sinfulness of LGB persons’ (Khan, 2007, p. 362). On the other hand, more progressive Christian groups may emphasise that the Bible should be understood as a product of its time, known as ‘contextual orientation’ (Cousens, Morrison and Fendrick, 2008, p. 6), or, in some cases, it should be understood that modern language and understandings cannot necessarily be projected onto an ancient text; ‘it is anachronistic to impose a modern word on an ancient document’ (Harris and Moran, 1999, p. 72).

The term ‘homosexual’ is a Greek-Latin hybrid, derived from the Greek ‘homos’, meaning ‘same’, and refers to sexual acts and affections between individuals of the same sex (Room, 1986, p. 84). The term first appeared in print in 1868, in a letter by the Austrian novelist Karl-Maria Kertbeny, who used it to argue against Prussian anti-sodomy laws (Feray, Herzel and Peppel, 1990). The term gained wider recognition in 1886, when psychiatrist Richard von Krafft-Ebing used both ‘homosexual’ and ‘heterosexual’ in his influential work *Psychopathia Sexualis*. The popularity of Krafft-Ebing's book helped solidify these terms as the standard vocabulary for sexual orientation in both medical and popular discourse (Federici, 2025). Prior to this, same-sex behaviours were often understood in terms of specific acts, rather than as an identity. The introduction of the term marked a significant shift in how sexuality was conceptualised, moving from a focus on behaviour to an understanding of sexual orientation as a ‘multidimensional construct, referring to an individual’s positioning on [...] sexual attraction, sexual behavior, romantic orientation, and sexual identity’

(Hall, Dawes and Plocek, 2021, pp. 1 - 2). This shift had profound implications for biblical scholarship, as it raised questions about the extent to which modern categories of sexuality can or should be applied to ancient texts. Jordan (1998, p. 6) argues that ‘sodomy as a category of sin was not a permanent feature of Christian teaching, but a construction that emerged in a particular historical context’, highlighting how medieval Christian theology played a key role in constructing the category of sodomy, long before the 19th-century emergence of homosexuality as an identity. He states that ‘before the 12th century, the Church did not define sodomy as a distinct sin; it simply viewed acts of same-sex sexual relations as a form of illicit behaviour, but not necessarily as a separate category’ (1998, p. 8). Within historical contexts, both canon law and church authorities used this definition and the process of categorisation to regulate sexual behaviour and maintain authority: ‘the Church’s regulation of sexual behaviour [...] was not a matter of moral consistency but of institutional power. Church authorities used the term [sodomy] selectively, applying it to certain acts while allowing others to pass unchallenged’ (Jordan, 1998, p. 40). This historical insight further problematises the retroactive imposition of modern sexual categories onto biblical texts, as it underscores that even within Christian history, sexual identities have been understood in shifting and context-dependent ways.

Similarly, Gerard Loughlin critiques the heteronormative assumptions that have long governed biblical interpretation. Loughlin (2008, p. 18) argues that biblical texts are far more ‘fluid’ and open to queer re-readings than traditional theological frameworks allow, and that these frameworks distort the deeper possibilities that exist within biblical texts: ‘the binary opposition between heterosexual and homosexual desire is an artificial construct, a modern imposition upon ancient texts. The texts themselves are more fluid, more open to the play of desire and bodies in ways that traditional theological readings have obscured’. I would argue that Loughlin is stating here that

the binary of heterosexual and homosexual desire is not inherent in the biblical texts but rather a later imposition, challenging the conventional view that biblical sexuality is a fixed or ‘rigid, God-given sexual order’ (Loughlin, 2008, p. 45). Loughlin’s arguments of heteronormative frameworks within the Bible are particularly pertinent to consider here, due to the relationship between heteronormativity and bisexuality. Loughlin (2008, p. 72) argues that the ‘rigid categories’ of heterosexual and homosexual placed within scripture are ‘products of modernity, not reflections of the biblical world’, emphasising how modern sexual categories have been superimposed on biblical texts, preventing a more nuanced and flexible interpretation of sexuality that could accommodate diverse human experiences, including, arguably, the fluidity of bisexuality. Consequently, we can therefore argue that the application of the term ‘homosexual’ to biblical texts is anachronistic, to requote Harris and Moran, and has the capacity to distort the original meanings and intentions of scriptural authors.

2.2.4a Biblical exegesis, homosexuality, and bisexuality

For biblical scholarship, this anachronism is particularly evident in translations and interpretations of key passages often cited in discussions of same-gender relationships, such as Leviticus 18:22, Romans 1:26-27, and 1 Corinthians 6:9. Many translations of these texts, particularly those influenced by 20th-century cultural and theological perspectives, render them as condemnations of homosexuality, despite the fact that the biblical authors had little concept of sexual orientation as a fixed identity, as considered above. The term ‘homosexual’ itself was only introduced into English Bible translations in the mid-20th century, most notably in the Revised Standard Version (1946), reflecting modern concerns rather than the linguistic and cultural context of the biblical texts. The implication of these modern ideals and views can have profound impacts on the relationships which Christians then form; as Bernhardt-House (2010, p. 55) states, Christians are often encouraged

to fully embrace individuals of all backgrounds, including those of ‘any possible sexual orientation, and yet the fundamental structure of certain Christian exegeses of their scriptures – especially Romans 1:26-27 – may in fact preclude the acceptance of [identities such as] bisexuality, even though it may be interpreted to embrace and allow for homosexuality’.

Further scholars have referenced additional passages that are used to denounce homosexuality as sinful. Masson and Nkosi (2017, p. 76) show the Bible’s ‘condemnation of homosexuality’ to be present in 1 Timothy 1:10, ‘where the Apostle Paul talks about the unnaturalness of homosexual practice; ‘the sexually immoral, *men who practice homosexuality*, enslavers, liars, perjurers, and whatever else contrary to sound doctrine’. It should be noted here that 1 Timothy 1:10, in certain biblical translations, does not use the word ‘homosexual’, and whilst this author is unaware of which translation the authors were using, the use of italics suggests that this phrase was inserted as a potential understanding, not a determinate one (see previous comment r.e. RSV 1946).

In biblical LGBT+ scholarship, much work focuses on biblical interpretations of homosexuality (Rogers, 2009; Himbaza, Schenker, and Edart, 2011; DeYoung, 2015) and the experiences of, or responses from, lesbian, gay, and heterosexual Christians. In recent times, research has been undertaken into transgender and intersex biblical interpretation (Cornwall, 2015; Hornsby and Guest, 2016), alongside queer bible commentaries (Guest *et al.*, 2006). However, when searching for scholarship that focuses particularly on bisexual interpretations or responses to the Bible, or how biblical passages can be interpreted under the lens of bisexuality, there is a distinctive gap in the research field.

2.2.4b Bisexuality and the Bible

There are no direct references to bisexuality in the Bible. In fact, ‘much Christianity is

predicated upon foundational stories (i.e., the Bible) that do[es] not mention bisexuality explicitly' (Mathers, Sumerau, and Cragun, 2018, p. 941). Therefore, it perhaps comes as no surprise that bisexual exegeses of the Bible are limited. Typically, when certain biblical passages are called on as a condemnation of homosexuality, bisexuality will automatically be included in this judgement, due to the ability of a bisexual person to engage in sexual acts with someone of the same gender. Ultimately, however, we cannot assume that this is the case, and so overall, there is 'no liturgical framework, no theology, no Christian ethic on how to live holistically as a bisexual or bi-intimate follower of Jesus Christ, whether sexually active or not' (Shepherd, 2019, p. 3).

In current scholarship, the only biblical passage that is interpreted with bisexuality as a focal point is Romans 1:26-27¹¹. Certain Biblical characters are occasionally assumed to be bisexual due to their relationships with individuals of more than one gender, such as David and Johnathan, and Ruth and Naomi, and it can be argued that Galatians 3:28, in its disruption of binaries ('there is no longer...') could be a superb anecdote for bisexuality and the way that it too challenges binaries (MCC North London, 2023). However, from an academic perspective, Romans 1:26-27 is the only passage to have been, thus far, responded to by scholars. Romans 1:26-27 is often brought into the spotlight as the only place in the Bible to mention female 'homosexuality' (we should again be conscious here of how these acts of 'homosexuality' are interpreted, and why this term may be used: see - Smith, 1996; Bernhardt-House, 2010). These acts of 'unnatural' eroticism between women, and the same between men, are interpreted by some as acts of bisexuality. Robinson (2014, pp. 646-7) argues that bisexuality is noticeably absent within 'gay, lesbian, and queer theologies'. For scholars

¹¹ 'For this reason, God gave them over to dishonourable passions. Their females exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural, and in the same way also the males, giving up natural intercourse with females, were consumed with their passionate desires for one another. Males committed shameless acts with males and received in their own persons the due penalty for their error' (New Revised Standard Version).

or theological texts that do reference bisexuality, its visibility may come through ‘blatant examples of theological homophobia’:

‘John J. McNeill distinguishes between the ‘genuine homosexual condition’, which he describes as permanent, and ‘the behaviour of perversion’ (1976: 41), which is situational, chosen, and indulgent’ (Robinson, 2016, p. 647).

Robinson (2014, p. 647) asserts that McNeill is suggesting any individual who can engage fluidly in heterosexual and homosexual acts, and ‘spills out of the binary categories of straight and gay/lesbian’ is a ‘pervert’ (McNeill, 1976, p. 39) and therefore, as she concludes, a bisexual, when we consider our understandings of bisexuality and the binary. Is Robinson right to assume that McNeill is referring to bisexuality here? He does not actively refer to bisexuality in this exegesis but does very briefly note bisexuality elsewhere in his text (1976, p. x; p. 94; p. 134). If we are to assume that McNeill is referring to the bisexual community, or perhaps what he understands the community to be, then it can be agreed that theological biphobia is present within this exegesis, and within Romans 1:26 – 27. However, I would query here – alongside the point made by Bernhardt-House, below – do we need to actively look for bisexuality within the Bible, in order for it to not be totally disregarded as an identity within Christian circles? Or, to what extent do we need to consider our cultural contexts within ancient and contemporary understandings – in other words, do our understandings align with what we are reading within scripture? Is bisexuality present within the Bible, or do we just hope for it to be to find grounds for bisexuality to be accepted within the Christian faith (even if this is not quite then shown in exegeses)?

Bernhardt-House (2010, p. 56) also contends that the language presented in Romans 1:26-27 could be used to argue that bisexuality plays a key role in the spread of HIV/AIDs. This passage is interpreted in such a way that Paul’s ‘penalty of error’ is seen as a ‘gay plague’ for sin, referring to

HIV, which could only be passed to heterosexuals via bisexual men, therefore scapegoating the bisexual community. He believes that Romans 1:26-27 also diminishes the bisexual identity entirely, arguing that the individuals referenced in the passage are often interpreted as simply 'switching' who they engage in sexual acts with i.e., heterosexuals acting in a homosexual way, and vice versa – removing any validity of bisexuality as an identity (p. 58).

Biblical scholarship on bisexuality remains limited, often struggling to reconcile the complexities of bisexual identities with the text's historical context. As such, much of the current discourse tends to avoid directly addressing bisexuality in scripture, either by failing to acknowledge its presence or by extracting meaning in ways that may not align with the text's original intent. Moving forward, it is crucial to examine how bisexual individuals engage with the Bible today, especially considering how modern interpretations of scripture intersect with the lived experiences of bisexual Christians. The Bible's influence in worship communities and in the everyday lives of bisexual individuals also warrants closer attention, particularly in how these communities navigate traditional heteronormative readings of scripture. Studies such as Shepherd's 2019 exploration of non-monogamy in biblical contexts and Toft's 2014 study, where participants opted to reinterpret Christianity outside traditional biblical frameworks, reveal a growing trend where individuals reshape their faith to align with their identities. Though bisexual engagement with the Bible has not been extensively explored, these insights suggest a need for further scholarship that accounts for the lived religion of bisexual Christians, analysing how contemporary understandings of language, identity, and sexuality influence biblical interpretations today. This area of study would benefit from a bisexual perspective that critiques heteronormative assumptions, allowing for more inclusive and nuanced theological reflections.

2.2.5 Christian policies, publications and doctrines

As well as following scripture, churches also have their own policies, publications, and doctrines on a variety of topics, including human sexuality. Within the Anglican Communion, the space within which the Church of England resides, these attitudes can vary greatly. The global dimensions of Anglicanism and sexuality are complex and multifaceted, shaped by the diverse cultural, social, and theological contexts in which the Anglican Communion operates. Anglicanism, with its worldwide presence encompassing a broad spectrum of theological traditions, experiences tension between maintaining doctrinal unity and responding to the cultural norms of various regions. Sexuality, particularly issues surrounding LGBT+ rights and same-gender relationships, has become a flashpoint for these tensions, as different provinces within the Communion interpret scripture and tradition through vastly different cultural lenses.

In the Global South, the Anglican Church often upholds traditional views on sexuality, aligning with more conservative interpretations of scripture that reject same-gender relationships. These positions are influenced not only by religious teachings but also by local cultural norms, many of which emphasise traditional family structures and social values that are often seen as incompatible with Western notions of LGBT+ inclusion (Goldingay *et al.*, 2011). In these contexts, the Church's stance on sexuality is often intertwined with national politics and social identity, where religious and cultural conservatism can serve as a counterpoint to the perceived 'encroachment' of Western liberalism (Anderson, 2011, p. 1594). Theological debates about sexuality within these provinces often reflect broader societal attitudes, where homosexuality is still criminalised or stigmatised, and LGBT+ individuals are marginalised (Anderson, 2011, p. 1600).

Conversely, in many parts of the Global North, the Anglican Church has become more open

to reconsidering traditional teachings on sexuality. The Episcopal Church in the United States and the Church of Canada, for example, have taken steps toward the inclusion of LGBT+ individuals, including the ordination of openly gay clergy and the blessing of same-gender marriages (Hill and Watson, 2006; Village, 2025). These shifts in doctrine and practice reflect not only theological evolution but also the broader cultural trends toward greater acceptance of LGBT+ rights in these regions. This divergence in perspectives between the Global South and Global North has created a rift within the Anglican Communion, with some conservative provinces threatening to sever ties with more liberal provinces, or even forming alternative networks, as seen with the Global Anglican Future Conference (GAFCON), which is aligned with more traditionalist views on sexuality (Sadgrove *et al.*, 2010).

The tension surrounding Anglicanism and sexuality also highlights the challenge of maintaining unity in a global Church that spans diverse cultural landscapes. Theological discussions on sexuality are not merely abstract debates about scriptural interpretation but are deeply connected to the lived realities of individuals and communities. For instance, in some African provinces, sexuality is a key site of theological and social ‘contestation’ (Bochow and van Dijk, 2012; Tamale, 2014), where debates over homosexuality often intersect with broader issues of identity, post-colonialism, and the role of the Church in society (Pui-lan, 2021). In these contexts, the Church's stance on sexuality is not only a matter of religious doctrine but also a reflection of how faith is understood in relation to power, culture, and national identity. At the same time, the global nature of the Anglican Communion provides a platform for dialogue between diverse cultural and theological perspectives. Anglicanism's ‘comprehensive ethos’ (Cadwell, 2013), the idea that the Church can hold together diverse viewpoints within its communion, offers a potential space for mediation and reconciliation on issues of sexuality. However, this ideal of unity has been strained by the deep

divisions that have emerged around LGBT+ inclusion. The ongoing debates within the Anglican Communion about sexuality thus reveal the complexities of global religious identity, as Anglicans must navigate the tensions between cultural contextualisation and theological orthodoxy.

Within these debates and complexities surrounding attitudes towards the LGBT+ community across the Anglican Communion, one such identity that is often absent from conversation, policy and publication is bisexuality. Church doctrines and publications will often discuss marriage, same-gender attraction, language within scripture, and some will go as far as to define sexualities or gender identities for those who may not be well versed in the topic of human sexuality and are approaching it for the first time. However, bisexuality is often limited to just this – a definition. Consequently, engagement with bisexual Christians surrounding this literature is scarce. The final section of the literature review, in focusing on church literature and bisexuality, will focus primarily on CofE literature due to the scope of this research study. Academic and social responses to this literature will also be examined, due to the different attitudes that these responses portray.

2.2.5a Relationships with Church literature

The CofE has produced multiple documents that discuss human sexuality. Some reports did not immediately make it into the public domain; The Osborne Report, written in 1989, was not published until 2012, with others considered ‘too radical to publish’ (Shaw, 2014, p. 347), such as ‘Homosexual Relationships: A Contribution to Discussion’ (1979)¹². Published nonetheless, this

¹² When writing for The Church Times, Shaw (2012) discusses the following: after the radical production of ‘Homosexual Relationships’, a working party was created to ‘listen[ing] to homosexual people, and gave [sic] the results of that listening in its report’. The report, known as the Osborne Report due to the group being chaired by the Rev. June Osborne, ‘drew on the direct testimony of lesbian and gay Christians’, and how these individuals ‘made sense’ of their lives as homosexuals. The aim of this working party was to encourage the Church of England to ‘face up to “what actually happens”’, and to remind the Church of its pastoral duties to all those within its care – even

report was seen as ‘too liberal by many’ (Thinking Anglicans, 2012), and was ‘largely ignored by the wider church’ (Religion Media Centre, 2022). Sexuality is a ‘hot topic’ within the CofE. Whilst discussions have been ongoing for decades, be it at nationwide conferences or within the pews of a local church, there are only a small handful of documents that allow us to build an opinion of the Church’s official standpoints, doctrine, or scripture aside. Many of these documents focus mostly on the ‘issue’ of homosexuality, or human sexuality as a whole. The introduction to this section will focus briefly on The Windsor and Pilling reports, alongside the Church’s most recent publication, *Living in Love and Faith. Issues in Human Sexuality and Some Issues* will also be examined, and in further detail, with academic and social responses to these texts and the themes within them, as the ‘key players’ in bisexuality discourse, considered.

The 2004 Windsor Report focused its attention on the ‘structural threat’ (Wilkins, 2005, p. 101) that issues surrounding human sexuality were (and questionably still are) causing the Anglican Communion. Whilst the report states that dialogue and discussions must be held surrounding homosexuality, the text actually says ‘very little’ about it (Beckwith, 2004, p. 359) and, by the end of the document, reaffirms the position of the Anglican Communion at the time; that homosexual practice is incompatible with scripture, and that same-gender unions cannot be legitimised or blessed. Due to the general lack of focus in the text, it will come as no surprise that there is no recognition of bisexuality within the Windsor Report. The Pilling Report, published in

homosexuals. Shaw goes on to state that ‘the Osborne report heralded an important call for all voices to be heard, but a new atmosphere of hostility and acrimonious debate about homosexuality entered the Church before the working party had finished its task’; the Church was not ready to face the information that the report was ready to provide. The report was leaked in 1990, ‘spark[ing] pressure’ for the Church to make a statement about homosexuality. This statement came in the form of *Issues*, published one year later. At the end of her piece for The Church Times, Shaw argues that, as of her time of writing, the listening process encouraged with the Osborne Report was yet to happen. There is a lack of information as to why the report was not published until 2012, and the report is only available (as of 2024) via the Thinking Anglicans website.

2013, takes a more direct approach to the discussion at hand. The report states that there has been ‘no systematic process of listening involving the Church of England as a whole’ (House of Bishops, 2013, p. 4); therefore, the aim of the report, after sharing extensive research, was ‘to offer findings and to form [...] facilitated conversations’ (Church of England, 2013). The report considers multiple factors, such as society’s changing views on marriage, issues of homophobia, science, scripture, and other theological writings. The report also engages with both positive and negative comments from lesbian and gay Christians about the Church’s process on approaching the topic of human sexuality. Since *Issues in Human Sexuality* (1991) and *Some Issues in Human Sexuality: A Guide to the Debate* (2003) were both released, the Pilling Report is the next publication in a long line to provide any attention to bisexuality. The report understands that sexuality is not ‘simply or irreducibly binary’ (House of Bishops, 2013, p. 56), therefore we should not think of the human population in this way. Instead, we should accept that there are those whose sexuality is fluid, and who may identify in such a way as bisexual, even if these individuals only exist as part of a ‘significant minority’ (House of Bishops, 2013, p. 61). Recommendations for conversation aside, the report seems to be in a similar situation to publications past, taking ‘200 pages to say very little at all’ (The Guardian, 2013). There is no further comment on bisexuality throughout the rest of the text.

The most recent document to be published by the Church of England is *Living in Love and Faith*, finally published in November 2020 after being delayed by the Covid-19 pandemic. The 468-page book and its accompanying resources were ‘designed to encourage and enable engagement and learning in a variety of settings’ (Church of England, 2020b), regarding marriage, sexual orientation, gender identity, and relationships. The highly anticipated publication received mixed reviews. Whilst the Student Christian Movement (2020) ‘value[d] and appreciate[d] the extensive work which has

gone into delivering these resources’, the next steps for the CofE should be action-led; discussions of gender and sexuality need to move away from focusing on the issues and should instead be focused on what should be done to tackle them. Andrew Goddard (psephizo.com, 2021) questioned if *LLF* is largely a failure; when talking with fellow evangelicals, one such critique was that ‘*LLF fails* to do what it sets out to do. Another, quite distinct critique, is that it fails *because* of what it sets out to do’. Yet, on the other hand, Adrian Thatcher (modernchurch.org.uk, 2020) argues that ‘there is much that is positive about *LLF*’, although his discussion piece is finalised with the statement that ‘it is [...] imperative that the constructive, progressive and liberal voices in the Church provide something better’.

Is *LLF* a ‘failure’? Perhaps this is quite a harsh way to brand the entire text, however this term could certainly be cast in the direction of the discussion on bisexuality. Including the book’s reference list and any acronym explanations, the word ‘bisexual’ (including ‘bisexuality’) only appears 29 times; without references or acronyms, ‘bisexual’ only appears 19 times, making brief appearances in statistics, definitions, and vague lived experiences. There is no further recognition of bisexuality. In 2023 (p. 16), a response document was written by the House of Bishops, where it was declared that ‘the *Living in Love and Faith* process has made us ever more aware of the riches and complexity of human identity. In recent decades, many in UK society have negotiated with, wrestled with, and come to accept a range of understandings of gender identity, as well as come to a better appreciation of trans, asexual and bisexual identities’, and that ‘much work and grace needs to be done, not least in a better and richer understanding of trans, bisexual and asexual people and their rightful cherished place within the Church and society’ (p. 16). I argue that the Christian community is yet to see this work and grace in action.

The previous three documents provide rich context for understanding the CofE's progression in its attempts to grapple with the apparent complexities of human sexuality. However, if these documents show anything, there is a serious lack of understanding and recognition when it comes to bisexuality in particular. Despite this, all hope is – potentially – not lost. Prior to all three texts, in 1991 and 2003, *Issues* and *Some Issues* were published respectively, both of which provided statements on bisexuality. These documents will be examined in light of both academic and social responses.

2.2.5b Academic responses to Issues and Some Issues, and their themes

Issues in Human Sexuality was published in 1991 by the Church of England House of Bishops. The report, commended by the General Synod as 'a landmark report that examined in detail the entire debate' (Religion Media Centre, 2022), provides various discussion points on the 'issues' of human sexuality, and offers suggestions as to how those with non-heterosexual desires can cope with these feelings. The purpose of the report was to encourage Christians to develop an understanding of these issues, and the feelings of others, in order to engage in 'prayerful study and reflection' (House of Bishops, 1991, p. vii). The report, in total, is 48 pages long. A majority of those pages are dedicated to the 'phenomenon' of homosexual love and issues pertaining to it. Bisexuality, at this point, is offered one paragraph of 119 words, with language that reduces bisexuals to hypersexual, promiscuous individuals who must seek some kind of therapeutic healing in order to discover their inner truth. A reminder of this passage can be found in Appendix A.

Some Issues in Human Sexuality: A Guide to the Debate was published in 2003 and serves as a response document to *Issues*. The chapter that responds to *Issues*' paragraph on bisexuality contains commentary from Elizabeth Stuart and Adrian Thatcher and, whilst Thatcher aims to encourage

discussions on bisexuality, the chapter still falls short. In fact, both *Issues* and *Some Issues* ‘are key in understanding why bisexuality is even more misunderstood compared to homosexuality. The statements see bisexuality as inevitably adulterous, as a confused form of sexuality and most contentiously, they assert that bisexuals can choose to be either heterosexual or homosexual’ (Toft, 2011, p. 13). Bisexuality is almost seen an afterthought in this text, especially as its aim was for the text to serve as ‘a study guide to help Anglicans “think through different aspects of gay, lesbian and transsexual relationships”’ (Religion Media Centre, 2022).

It could certainly be argued that the discussions of homosexuality and transsexuality (to use the language of the text) were somewhat groundbreaking in *Issues*, considering the social context in which the text was written. During the time that *Issues* was published, HIV/AIDS had first been diagnosed in the UK ten years prior, causing communities to be rife with queerphobia. Section 28, which prohibited the promotion of homosexuality in media, literature, and schools, had been in place for three years at the time of publication. Four years prior, 75% of the British population, in the British Social Attitudes Survey, said they believed homosexuality to be ‘wrong or mostly wrong’ (2023). With all of these factors to consider, it is no wonder that Shepherd (2019, p. 48) queries how in any way this document can be ‘commended’ when the language targeting the bisexual community is negative, ill-assuming, and offensive. She also notes the lack of wordcount offered to bisexuality, asserting that the Church of England is ‘so dismissive [...] of the bisexual experience, that bisexuality merits just ten lines (119 words) [...] under Point 5.8’ (p. 48). Thatcher (1993, p.156) argues for the ‘oppressive’ nature of the passage, marking it as ‘insensitive, ignorant and inconsistent’.

It is arguably fact that the language in *Issues* is wholly derogatory towards the bisexual experience, even with contextual analysis in place, and is therefore undeniable that responses to this

passage may choose to pinpoint particular words or phrases. Thatcher (2003, p. 282) comments on the choice of ‘promiscuous’, stating that bisexuals are seen in this way as the term implies multiple partners; bisexuality is often confused with polyamory, and whilst some bisexuals may choose to engage with multiple partners at the same time, this should not be an automatic assumption. As Toft (2011, p. 84) argues, ‘this is a rather lazy generalisation’. According to *Issues*, the promiscuity of bisexuals must ‘inevitably’ lead to them being ‘unfaithful’, again, another gross misinterpretation assuming that due to bisexuals being sexually or romantically attracted to more than one gender, they will automatically choose to ‘cheat’ on their partners when in a relationship. Shepherd (2019, p. 48) disputes this accusation as a ‘highly presumptuous statement that would seem to suggest that all forms of bisexual expression involve genital relations or other acts of perceived unfaithfulness. Nowhere is heterosexual behaviour so narrowly categorised nor so stringently prescribed’.

‘Marriage’ as an exact term is not used in *Issues*’ discussion of bisexuality. However, what the text does recommend is that bisexuals strive to enter committed relationships in which they can find satisfaction; ideally, with a partner of another gender. Other parts of the text ‘reject the suggestion that same-sex relationships are ‘parallel’ or ‘alternative’ to heterosexuality’’ (Robinson, 2014, p. 644), emphasising the Church’s belief that same-sex relationships ‘fall short of God’s purpose for human beings’ (Sherwood, 2020). Yet even if bisexuals choose to marry a partner of another gender and commit to a lifelong, monogamous relationship, they are still met with resentment for not meeting their societally-induced stereotype; ‘the opposition to bisexuals marrying an other-sex partner lies in mainstream theology’s portrayal of us as conflicted, compulsive, or hypersexual’ (Robinson, 2014, p. 644) – we just cannot win.

If, for bisexuals, ‘heterosexual’ marriage cannot be achieved, then bisexuals should consider if celibacy or abstinence is the correct route for them to follow. Whilst some bisexuals may choose to be celibate or abstinent for personal or religious reasons, it is incorrect to assume that every bisexual would be open to these ideas. In their study of celibate gay Christians, Yarhouse *et al* (2017, pp. 52 - 53) noted that whilst some Christians can openly and comfortably embrace an LGBT+ Christian identity, others may instead ‘reconcile a gay identity and a conservative Christian sexual ethic and faith identity [...] [and] refrain from engaging in same-sex relationships’. This can, unfortunately, lead to marginalisation, an issue that is already tricky enough for bisexual Christians. In the aforementioned study, whilst some Christians still saw the study participants as sinners for their sexual orientation, some members of the LGBT+ community saw them to be repressing their identity by conforming to Christian values. It is as if *Issues* provides bisexuals with three roads that lead to nowhere – no matter the choice they make, it will be incorrect.

Could it be argued that *Issues* is focusing too much on the sex lives of bisexuals? In Toft’s study, a handful of participants believed just that, and found a way to use celibacy to their advantage without feeling overly judged for their choices. By being celibate, Toft’s (2014, p. 557) participants could continue to be bisexual in a more ‘acceptable’ manner, arguing that the ‘true message of the Christian church is best espoused through bisexuality, whereby people are attracted to aspects other than solely the sex of the individual’. Ultimately, as Thatcher (2003, p. 216) reminds us, celibacy ‘is a gift, not a requirement’. This idea stems from scripture; in 1 Corinthians 7, where Paul explains the good nature of singleness and how his celibacy is a gift from God, and in Matthew 19:12, Jesus states that there are eunuchs who have made themselves in such a way for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven. These individuals are understood to have the capabilities to be celibate and will therefore

choose to remain this way. Whilst it could be argued that it is a positive that bisexuals are being encouraged to act in such a biblical manner, Thatcher (2003, p. 216) believes this notion is still incorrect and shows a misunderstanding of bisexuality; ‘the stark choice between celibacy or heterosexual marriage places it within a framework that knows nothing of bisexuality and cannot cope with it. Even homosexuals were allowed the right of conscience’.

When responding to *Issues*, another key term, or theme, that scholars often engage with is that of ambiguity (See Section 4.6, Chapter 4, for further discussion). Ambiguity can be defined as being open to more than one interpretation, not having a singular, obvious meaning, or being unclear or undecided (OLD, 2020). Since *Issues* was published, understandings of bisexuality have continued to progress; the idea of the bisexual umbrella emphasises how bisexuality can have more than one singular, obvious meaning. Those who identify under the umbrella may not only be attracted to cisgender men and women, but also those who are transgender, genderqueer, or non-binary (Flanders, 2017). Bisexuality is fluid, and many bisexuals will identify their attractions in slightly different ways. Despite this, it is perhaps the final definition of ambiguous that stands out the most – unclear or undecided. Many bisexuals, especially those who come out at a younger age, are often told that they are undecided about their sexuality identity or are identifying as bisexual as part of a transitional phase, before ultimately identifying as heterosexual or homosexual. Thatcher (1993, p. 156) disputes this, arguing that ‘bisexual orientation is ambiguous only in relation to fixed alternatives. Might it be that these [fixed alternatives] are ambiguous rather than bisexual people?’. When we consider the language of *Issues*, one which is rooted in binary structures that still seem so prevalent in Christian thought today, it could certainly be argued that bisexual ambiguity is still present within the CofE, and Thatcher’s frame of thought is yet to become the norm.

One final piece of language that stands out in *Issues* – one that despite being commented on within research, is surprisingly vacant within actual field studies – is the use of the phrase ‘achieve a degree of inner healing’, something that bisexuals should be able to achieve by seeking therapy. This process of healing will allow bisexuals to discover what the Church refers to as ‘the truth of their personality’. Shepherd (2019, p. 49) interprets the final line of this passage to state that if bisexuals cannot ‘follow the way of holiness’ (House of Bishops, 1991, p.42), as ‘defined in heterosexual marriage or celibacy’, then they should seek some form of support in order to resolve their ‘potential personality disorder’, (Shepherd, 2019, p. 49). This choice of language, of ‘potential personality disorder[s]’, is Shepherd’s particular interpretation, and it is strong. Is Shepherd justified in this language? I would certainly argue that her passion comes from her own unique positionality as a bisexual woman and surely, undoubtedly, no bisexual person would be happy to have their sexuality in some way affiliated with a personality disorder. Personality disorders are ‘described in the [...] ICD-10 as ‘deeply ingrained and enduring behaviour patterns, manifesting themselves as inflexible responses to a broad range of personal and social situations’’ (Kendell, 2002, p. 110). Is this what Shepherd believes the Church is labelling bisexuality as? I would argue that this may be an extreme take, however, it is evident that the Church is still trying to allude to *something* and sees bisexuality as in some way an option outside of the norm that needs reparation or support (as shown in the discussions raised about conversion therapy at the 2021 General Synod). Ultimately, it is completely unfair for the Church to suggest that the bisexual community needs healing, or suffers from a lack of ‘truth’ when understanding their own personalities and identities. As a community that is ‘more prone to mental health problems than either heterosexual, or lesbian and gay, people’ (Barker, 2015, p. 369), I would argue that there are no grounds for the Church to be suggesting such painful and emotionally chaotic actions to this community. In turn, the Church should also consider that the choice should be given to bisexuals alone. As earlier research shows, some bisexuals have found ways

to bring their faith and sexuality together by ‘doing’ bisexuality in a way that they deem acceptable. For other bisexual Christians, there may still be struggles in attempting to reconcile faith and sexual identity. However, whatever their path, bisexual Christians should be able to decide their own ‘truth’ – the Church may support in this, but should not decide it.

2.2.5c Social responses to Issues and Some Issues, and their themes

The introduction to this thesis was opened with a question raised by Rev. Mae Christie at the 2021 General Synod. To put social responses to *Issues* or *Some Issues* into context, let us examine the proposed rationale behind the raising of the question by Christie, and how this could be linked to a movement in social reform.

Rev. Christie raised what is known as a Private Members’ Motion. According to the CofE website, ‘Private Members’ Motions are one of a number of ways in which debates can be brought to the attention of the General Synod’ (Church of England, 2023b). In order for motions to be considered by Synod, they must gain at least 100 expressions of interest. As of the 21st of June 2023, Rev. Christie’s motion had gained 127 signatures. The motion raised related to the place of *Issues* in the CofE ordination process, with Rev. Christie posing ‘that this Synod request that the House of Bishops remove any requirements relating to *Issues* [...] from the Vocations (Shared Discernment) Process’ (Church of England, 2023b). Rev. Christie’s motion relates to a specific notion of CofE policy, that upon first glance has nothing to do with the wider bisexual Christian community.

So why does she matter? Around the time of the November Synod gathering, Rev. Christie chose to share Section 5.8 of *Issues* on her Twitter account. Why did she do this? There could be a plethora of reasons, but one could suggest that she is choosing to highlight the horrors of what really

exists within 5.8 – and discussions of Section 5.8 suddenly began to appear and grow on the platform. As of July 2023, Rev. Christie’s Twitter account no longer seems to be active, so unfortunately her original tweet cannot be referenced. However, responses to her tweet are still available to view on the platform, and unsurprisingly, the passage – and *Issues* as a whole – did not gather a positive response from others utilising the platform. The Rev. Dr Helen Dawes (2021) responded directly to Section 5.8, commenting ‘I’ve been ordained so long I wasn’t asked to assent to *Issues in Human Sexuality*, but the snippet on bisexuality that’s circulating here is clearly so wrong and callous that we need an urgent conversation about how discernment processes can do better’. Responses to other sections of *Issues* were also raised. In January 2023, the Religion Media Centre (2023) quoted the Rev. Charlie Bell, stating ‘*Issues in Human Sexuality*... is absurd and immoral’. Canon Jeremy Pemberton (2023), the first priest in the CofE to publicly enter into a same-gender marriage, responded with ‘of course it is. And it should be burnt’¹³. In the same month, the CofE announced that it would scrap the ‘controversial church document’ (Farley, 2023). It should be noted that the BBC report only refers to the document being scrapped due to its statement that same-gender clergy in relationships should be celibate. However, reference to *Issues* have also been removed from the CofE’s discernment and ordination webpage. The relationship between *Issues* and ordination is mentioned very briefly by an ordinand interviewed by Shepherd (2019, p. 89), who claimed ‘I find it hard to believe that the official documents ordinands are forced to accept has such a fundamental misunderstanding of bisexuality...’¹⁴.

¹³ The aforementioned tweets can be found in Appendix C.

¹⁴ In a world of peer-reviewed articles, edited texts, and esteemed journals, it could be questioned as to why we bother to pay heed to tweets, social media posts, or as will be noted below, blog entries. I argue that, in this particular instance, there has been a severe lack of detailed academic responses to *Issues* or *Some Issues*, which leads us to query how we can build a suitable narrative surrounding policy. I argue that by choosing to examine social responses on Twitter/X to these texts (*Issues* in particular), this research highlights the complex and constantly shifting narrative that exists around Christian policy, and emphasises the need for clear, critical, and detailed responses to these texts. Perhaps then, the CofE will pay better attention to the issues that *Issues* has caused.

The only other social response that appears during an online search of *Issues*, or Section 5.8 in particular, is a 2016 blog post written by Kathleen Jowitt, where the author states that that ‘the majority of my secular straight acquaintance agrees that the Church’s attitude to homosexuality is bafflingly uncharitable, but I’ve had to explain a tedious number of times that no, I’m still only sleeping with the person I’m married to’ (kathleenjowitt.com). Interestingly, Jowitt’s blog piece also brings Twitter into the equation. Jowitt links to a tweet from the Rev. Claire Jones, who shares Section 5.8 alongside the comment ‘here, once again, is the @c_of_e’s official view on bisexual people. Please stop using this 25 y/o document. Please’¹⁵. Returning to Jowitt’s blog, she mentions that she has undertaken counselling in the past, but at no point has this counselling been due to her bisexuality; ‘that stint of counselling, and all the thinking I did after that, didn’t ‘heal’ me of being bisexual, because bisexuality is not something that needs to be healed. ‘Dealing with’ bisexuality by ignoring it is, pastorally speaking, a terrible move’ (kathleenjowitt.com, 2016).

After the initial spark of responses to Section 5.8 after Rev. Christie’s tweet, there appears, according to my research, to have been no further social dialogue surrounding Section 5.8 on any social media platforms. Why is this? Is it because the text is no longer seen as relevant, even though more recent publications have not set out to replace it? Are bisexual Christians actually aware of its existence, or even if so, do they feel it is not worth talking about? Is social media not seen as the correct platform to discuss Church publications? Even after purposely choosing to engage with clergymen, ordinands, and queer Christians on Twitter, any further searches for responses to Section 5.8 came up short. Perhaps, as far as social platforms are concerned, the text is not worth the 280 characters per tweet?

¹⁵ This tweet, alongside responses, and references to Jowitt’s blog, can be found in Appendix C.

2.2.6 Concluding thoughts

This literature reviewed highlights the complexities surrounding bisexuality, lived religion, and the heteronormative structures embedded within the Church of England. Bisexual Christians face unique challenges as they navigate a faith tradition that often fails to accommodate non-binary understandings of sexuality. The intersection of heteronormativity and church policies has historically marginalised bisexual identities, reinforcing rigid sexual categories that fail to reflect the lived realities of many believers. Whilst some denominations have taken steps toward inclusion, the dominant institutional stance remains one that prioritizes heterosexual relationships, contributing to feelings of exclusion and invisibility among bisexual individuals.

Lived religion provides a critical framework for understanding how bisexual Christians engage with faith beyond Church policies or official doctrine. It allows for an exploration of the personal, cultural, and social contexts that shape religious experience, recognising that faith is not solely dictated by institutional teachings but is also formed through daily practices, relationships, and individual interpretations. The literature underscores the importance of personal and communal expressions of faith, illustrating that many bisexual Christians reinterpret religious teachings, seek out affirming communities, or adopt flexible approaches to doctrine in order to sustain their spiritual identity.

Heteronormativity remains a pervasive force within religious institutions, shaping church policies and influencing broader societal attitudes toward sexuality. The assumption that heterosexual relationships are the moral and theological ideal ostracises bisexual individuals, who often find their identities either ignored or problematised within religious discourse. This reinforces binary conceptions of sexuality, which fail to acknowledge the fluidity and complexity of bisexual

experiences. The literature reveals how this heteronormative framework leads to both internal and external conflicts for bisexual Christians, as they struggle to reconcile their faith with their sexual identity in spaces that often invalidate their experiences.

Despite the growing body of research on LGBT+ experiences within religious institutions, significant gaps remain in the literature, particularly concerning bisexual Christians. Much of the existing scholarship on sexuality and faith focuses on the experiences of lesbian and gay individuals, often subsuming bisexuality under broader discussions of homosexuality. This lack of specificity contributes to the ongoing invalidation of bisexual identities and experiences, leaving critical questions unaddressed. Further research is needed to explore how bisexual Christians engage with faith in ways that are distinct from their lesbian and gay counterparts, particularly in relation to church teachings, pastoral care, and theological interpretations of bisexuality. Additionally, whilst lived religion has been widely studied as a means of understanding how individuals navigate faith beyond doctrinal constraints, there is a limited examination of how institutional church policies actively shape or hinder the religious experiences of bisexual believers. Future research should critically assess how church teachings on marriage, sexuality, and gender impact bisexual Christians differently and examine the ways in which these individuals resist, reinterpret, or adapt to institutional frameworks.

In conclusion, this literature review underscores the importance of addressing the gaps in research on bisexuality, faith, and church policies. By centring lived religion and critically interrogating the role of heteronormativity within religious institutions, contributions can be made to create a more nuanced and inclusive understanding of how bisexual Christians experience and practice their faith. A more comprehensive approach to these issues will not only enhance academic

discourse but also provide valuable insights for faith communities seeking to foster greater inclusivity and support for bisexual believers.

Chapter 3

Research methodologies, considerations, and methods

‘Dissemination and communication of research should be considered an integral part of any research project’ (Marín-González *et al.*, 2017, p. 258)

Impactful research should include the dissemination and sharing of knowledge to make a difference to policy, publications, practice, and experiences in society. For those involved in qualitative research, a ‘dual mission’ must be undertaken, ‘to generate knowledge through rigorous research and to uphold ethical standards and principles’ (Damianakis and Woodford, 2012, p. 708). Data collated for this thesis will involve a small but rich sample collection and will combine an examination of lived experiences alongside detailed insights into the attitudes of those involved in policies and publications – both areas are currently unresearched. In turn, the interviews generated by this research will provide an important insight into the lives and attitudes of participants. The research data will support the formation of a curated guidance document to inform future thinking when publishing literature about, or discussing, non-heterosexual Christians. Participants in this research are being given the opportunity to define their faith and sexuality in their own ways, as long as both fall under the respective umbrellas of bisexual identity, and CofE worship.

The purpose of this thesis is to offer comprehensive research and current insights into the experiences of bisexual Christians who participate in worship in the CofE, particularly focusing on how their daily lives are influenced by, or contrast with, the official positions articulated by the Church. Despite growing interest in the experiences of bisexual Christians, little attention has been paid to the formal stances of the CofE regarding bisexuality, often limited to analysing texts such as *Issues*, primarily due to the contentious language found in Section 5.8. However, such analyses are

often constrained in scope. Therefore, by conducting interviews with individuals who identify as bisexual and worship within the Church, alongside a second group of individuals involved with CofE publications on sexuality, this study aims to advance understandings of the disparity between those formulating policies and Church publications, and those whom these publications directly affect. Furthermore, this research aims to create an educational and progressive dialogue surrounding that which I believe to be ‘lacking’ with the Church’s attitude on sexuality:

- the lack of relationship between bisexual Christian lived experiences and Church language which describes and dehumanises them;
- the lack of understanding surrounding bisexual attitudes to marriage within a Christian context, and how this may affect one’s faith and/or sexual identities;
- the lack of bisexual-specific contributions to dialogue of queering space, and how Christian spaces can be queered in order to create havens of inclusion and acceptance.

Any discrepancies that exist between the Church’s prescribed expectations for bisexual lives, and the realities experienced by individuals, will be highlighted within this research study.

This chapter will move away from a theoretical, literature-based perspective to focus on the practical elements that will ultimately drive this research forward. I am aware of the gaps that exist within this field of study. Whilst bisexual Christian theology has gone so far in providing insights into the lived experiences of bisexual Christians, there is limited research that develops understandings of bisexual Christian responses to i) policies, literature and language published by Christian churches, ii) considering marriage within church spaces and the impacts this may have on navigating bisexual Christian identity, iii) the ability to ‘queer’ spaces, and, vi) how bisexual

Christians can create places within Christian contexts that allows them to live authentically within their unique identity. In order to address these gaps through qualitative fieldwork, the following research statements will form the basis of this data collection process:

RS1: To provide a voice for bisexual Christians through the use of qualitative, semi- structured interviews, subsequently followed by an interpretative phenomenological data analysis (IPA), in order to platform the unique challenges that bisexual Christians face.

RS2: To gain an insight through further qualitative, semi-structured interviews (and data analysis using IPA) with academics and clergy involved in the CofE's *LLF* project, of what the perspectives and proposed strategies of policymakers and publication contributors are surrounding bisexuality within the Church, and in turn, what those involved in these processes believe can be done to enhance the experiences of bisexuals within the CofE.

RS3: Through these interview processes, and accompanying literature analysis, to develop knowledge of how Christian and bisexual identities can intersect and influence each other, and ultimately, disseminate guidance on how to provide safe and inclusive spaces at a parish level that begin to understand and champion bisexual identities.

3.1 Research methodologies

3.1.1 Theoretical frameworks

Various theoretical frameworks will be utilised throughout this study, and will shape the full research process from recruitment to data collection, through to data analysis. The use of interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), queer and bisexual theories, and understandings of

heteronormativity and lived religion (as discussed in detail in the literature review) will help to achieve all three research statements by:

1. Providing a detailed analytical framework in which to analyse and articulate the data collected.
2. Developing a deeper understanding of the complexities and challenges that the LGBT+ community, and bisexuals in particular, face with shaping identities and deconstructing norms, particularly in a lived religion context.
3. Develop a deeper understanding of how the realms of heteronormativity and lived religion exist within, and interact with, the bisexual Christian experience, and how factors such as marginalisation, a lack of bisexual space, and misunderstandings of lived experience can be exacerbated,

I argue that this multi-methods approach will ultimately support the triangulation process that formulates this research study (see Figure 1 in the introduction to this thesis).

3.1.2 Interpretative phenomenological analysis

Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) is a qualitative form of research that grew out of the field of psychology (Smith and Osborn, 2004, p. 229). IPA takes an idiographic approach, seeking to gain individualised or unique insights, as opposed to gathering generalised information (Shinebourne, 2011). Through this mindset, IPA aims to provide an insight into a person's lived experiences and is primarily concerned with the individual's perceptions of an account or event (Smith and Osborn, 2003, p. 53). IPA is:

‘committed to the detailed examination of a particular case. It wants to know in detail what

the experience for *this* person is like, what sense *this* particular person is making of what is happening to them’ (Smith, Flowers, and Larkin, 2022, p. 3).

IPA’s idiographic approach allows researchers to pay detailed attention to particular nuances.

Chan and Farmer (2017, p. 285) argue that IPA ‘serves as an innovative research method’ when examining lived experience. Their study notes particular nuances that may exist for marginalised groups; for example, within the LGBT+ community, queer people of colour or queer disabled people may experience ‘longstanding forms of oppression’ such as ableism or heterosexism. Through the use of IPA, these nuances can be given an appropriate platform that pays suitable attention to their individual experiences; ‘IPA gives voice to each of these nuances by instituting an idiographic approach, treating each participant’s narrative with value and meaning’ (Chan and Farmer, 2017, p. 287). Nuances can also be examined in richer detail through using IPA in a faith-based context. Murphy *et al* (2022, p. 155) utilised IPA in their exploration of the religious experiences of Baptist worshippers; taking an idiographic approach through this method of analysis allowed the researchers to develop a richer understanding of how ‘lived religion is diverse and, even within a single community, different individuals can have contrasting understandings and expressions of their shared beliefs’. Lived religion emphasises that religion is experienced and encountered in different ways due to the circumstances and events that shape an individual’s life, and stresses that these experiences are just as, if not more important, than what is dictated in doctrine and scripture. With this in mind, IPA – as it highlights the unique diversities of individual experiences – is a strong theoretical approach for considering distinctive experiences that can exist within faith communities. The utilisation of IPA in studies of LGBT+ communities, and faith groups, will be discussed in more detail within subsequent sections.

IPA permits flexibility within research ‘as it allows researchers to use their own experience-based interpretation to add value and clarity’ (Cronin and Lowes, 2016, p. 14). It also gives the

researcher the opportunity to explore participant context in more detail, alongside the diversity that comes with individual lived experiences (Miller and Minton, 2016, p. 47). Therefore, dependent on the focus of the research study, the researcher is given the opportunity to move their study in different directions to allow for the best sharing experience for the participant, encouraging a richer data collection. This can be supported through using ‘how’ as opposed to ‘what’ questions to encourage flexibility and to give the opportunity for multiple interpretations of experiences to be explored (Chan and Farmer, 2017, p. 289).

The most common way of collecting data in IPA is through semi-structured interviewing, a technique that ‘allows researchers to engage in real-time in-depth conversations with participants (Miller and Minton, 2016, p. 49). The flexible format of semi-structured interviewing enables researchers to depart from rigid questioning without deviation. It instead provides freedom to dive deeper into topics as they arise, adjust the interview trajectory based on points of interest, and fosters a more personalised dialogue with participants. The rapport that is built between researcher and participant ultimately provides ‘encouragement for meaningful reflection and sharing’ (Miller and Minton, 2016, p. 49).

Finally, research studies using IPA often focus on small sample sizes, although in qualitative research, ‘sample size [...] has been the subject of enduring discussions’ (Vasileiou *et al.*, 2018, p. 2). One such area that is discussed when considering sample sizes is the question of ‘breadth versus depth’, and what should be prioritised. It is suggested that ‘studies using larger sample sizes produce broader findings whilst studies with smaller sample sizes result in deeper findings’ (Spiers and Riley, 2019, p. 282), therefore it should be asked, what exactly is the aim of the researcher? As IPA is inherently concerned with understanding individual experiences, smaller sample sizes are appropriate

for capturing their richness and complexity. However, larger sample sizes may achieve greater variability and saturation. Saturation refers to the point in qualitative research when collecting additional data no longer yields new insights or themes. Smaller sample sizes may be more suitable to reach saturation in IPA because of the detailed, in-depth exploration of each participant's experience. On the other hand, larger sample sizes may be necessary to achieve saturation, particularly when exploring diverse or complex phenomena. However, Francis *et al* (2010, pp. 1229 – 1230) argue that there is 'no agreed method of establishing when data saturation has been reached', so therefore, is sample size completely unique to the research study in question? There are, of course, broader answers to the question of sample size. As IPA aims to focus on rich, detailed data analysis that provides intricate insights into a group, community or phenomena, it is argued that smaller sample sizes allow the researcher to take particular time and effort in transcribing and analysing interviews, leading to more detailed observations about those within the sample group, instead of making broad-sweeping, general statements (Smith and Osborn, 2003, p. 55). In short, 'IPA recognises three to ten participants as a reasonable sample size' (Roberts *et al.*, 2022, p. 9).

Considering the above components of IPA, I argue that this method of data analysis is most suitable to use in this research for the following reasons:

1. **Utilising IPA will allow me to gain a detailed and personal insight into the lived religious experiences of bisexual Christians.** This is vital to this research study as the experiences of bisexual Christians, and the experiences of those involved in Christian policies and publications, are currently lacking areas within this field.
2. **IPA attends to the nuances in the lives of participants.** I aim to incorporate this attention

into my data collection and analysis. As the review of literature has shown, bisexuality is a particularly nuanced identity with unique complexities, which I argue can be best examined through the use of IPA.

3. **If necessary, IPA gives the scope to move interviews in alternate directions**, giving participants the platform to share further pertinent information that will contribute to a richer data collection process. I argue this to be particularly pertinent for this research area due to the lack of understand currently surrounding the relationship between bisexuality and Christianity. Adopting the fluidity that IPA allows will encourage the potential for this research to reveal areas of discussion that may not have been considered.
4. Incorporating a **smaller sample size** will enable a greater focus on data ‘in-depth’ and will enable the uncovering of unique intricacies that may remain hidden in a larger sample size. In turn, I argue that this will allow the voices of the participants to be amplified, and greater attention paid to their thoughts, which is not possible with a significantly larger sample size.

3.1.2a IPA and the study of religion

Interpretative phenomenological analysis presents a robust framework for investigating religion. Spickard (2011, p. 333) contends that it is a potent but often ‘overlooked’ method within this realm. The phenomenology of religion is often interpreted in different ways, with many scholars contributing to the field. Wrathall (2006), Nitsche (2017) and Gschwandtner (2019) argue that in developing the work of scholars such as Husserl (1900, 1913, 1931) and Heidegger (1920, 1927, 1930), the concept of phenomenology focuses on describing and analysing human experiences as they are lived. For example, in a religious context, phenomenology will seek to describe religious

experiences, rituals, symbols, and beliefs, without making judgement about religious truth claims. Phenomenology also seeks to examine commonalities and differences in religious experiences across cultures and traditions (Allen, 2005). Phenomenology articulates the importance of understanding religious phenomena from the perspective of the believer, and how beliefs and practices shape human experiences and perceptions of reality (Allen, 1972; Rennie, 2007; Durac, 2007; Manolache, 2017).

As previously mentioned, phenomenology strives to delve into the core of an individual's lived experiences, emphasising their subjective perceptions; 'in its pure form, phenomenology seeks to describe experience as it presents itself to subjective consciousness' (Spickard, 2011, p. 333). This allows us to develop an understanding of lived religious experience from the mouth and mind of the participant, discovering exactly what their faith means to them and drawing conclusions from this, as opposed to analysing numerical or factual data, and doctrine. Spickard (2011, p. 217) argues that IPA benefits the study of religion, as it 'indicates that scholars should focus most on observable activities, actual events, and practice, rather than on what texts, preachers, or even 'ordinary participants' assert people ought to do'. Religious research studies that utilise IPA include intersections of religion and health (Nuzum *et al.*, 2017; Semlyen, Ali, and Flowers, 2017), cultural beliefs and religious heritage (Jones and Nigbur, 2022; Murphy, Jones, and Nigbur, 2023), and spiritual events and life changes, such as pilgrimage or conversion (Hetherington, 2018; Iqbal *et al.*, 2019).

This research study focuses on the experiences of faith embodied by bisexual Christians in the CofE, alongside how those involved in the upper echelons of Church policy and publications perceive and attempt to understand the faith experiences of the bisexual community. I argue that IPA constitutes a strong analytical framework when considering the faith aspect of this study for two

reasons. Firstly, phenomenology stresses the importance of understanding experiences such as the rituals that one may undertake, or one's relationship to their church space, and how these experiences manifest in the lives of those they affect. This is particularly relevant to the aims of this study, as it allows for the centering of bisexual Christians' voices and the complexities of their lived realities within the Church (RS1). Through qualitative, semi-structured interviews and an interpretative approach, IPA enables an exploration of how bisexual Christians navigate faith and identity, shedding light on both personal and institutional challenges. Secondly, considering the focus on language that will become prevalent throughout this study, and how experiences of, and relationships with, language can affect one's faith experiences, I would argue that IPA offers an analytical platform that allows for a deeper and more connected understanding of experiences of faith and the multiple intricacies and nuances that can affect this, especially for a minority group. This is significant when analysing the perspectives of policymakers and clergy involved in the CofE's *LLF* project (RS2), as their interpretations of bisexuality and faith are not only shaped by theological frameworks but also by the language and discourse they use to articulate inclusion and policy change. IPA provides the necessary tools to examine both individual and institutional understandings, highlighting tensions, assumptions, and potential areas for progress. Furthermore, by bridging these personal and institutional narratives, this study aims to develop knowledge on how bisexual and Christian identities intersect and influence each other (RS3). IPA's interpretative nature allows for an in-depth analysis of how individuals make sense of their identities within faith communities, and how these insights can inform practical recommendations for creating safer and more inclusive parish spaces that actively affirm bisexual Christians.

3.1.2b IPA and queer studies

Tucker *et al* (2021, p. 3) argue that 'a key area of concern in IPA research [...] has been

sexuality'. Scholars examining sexuality find IPA an appropriate form of analysis as it 'offers a means to derive in-depth meaning attending to the complexities of lived experience' (Chan and Farmer, 2017, p. 285). Returning to the concept of nuances (as noted in Section 3.1.2), through IPA encouraging researchers to 'treat a participant's lived experience with value and meaning by recognising their individuality' (Fletcher, 2022, p. 38), LGBT+ individuals are therefore given a voice, one which is particularly prevalent to acknowledge 'given the evolution of identities exemplifying LGBTQEQ+ communities through nonheteronormative and noncisnormative representations' (Chan and Farmer, 2017, p. 287). As these voices continue to grow, it is critical that suitable, detailed analysis can be provided in order to adequately support and empower queer communities.

Queer studies that adopt IPA as their method of analysis focus on a variety of nuances, including genderism within the LGBT+ community (Farmer and Byrd, 2015), psychotherapy and religious LGBT+ experiences (Meades, 2023), queer experiences within higher education (Roop, 2014; Chan, 2018), and LGBT+ experiences of space (Prest, 2016). When considering the relationship between IPA and queer studies, and its ability to provide critical understandings of the complexities that exist within queer lives, I again argue IPA to be the most suitable analysis platform for this research, as my study aims to provide more nuanced and detailed understandings of the bisexual community, one which is often so hidden within both LGBT+ and Christian discourses¹⁶.

3.1.3 Queer and bisexual theory

When attempting to position my research within theoretical frameworks, I was immediately

¹⁶ A step-by-step examination of how IPA will be utilised in the data analysis stage of this study can be found in Section 3.3.4a.

drawn towards queer theory in both name and nature. Queer theory challenges the ‘undisputed and unmarked norm’ of heterosexuality (Schlossberg, 2001, p. 5), recognising sexuality’s ‘inherent fluidity’ (Callis, 2009, p. 215). It challenges traditional notions of gender, sexuality, and identity by questioning and deconstructing established norms, categories, and binaries. Queer theory explores the way in which societal standards and power structures influence and shape understandings of gender and sexuality and seeks to create spaces for diverse and non-normative identities and experiences. Manning (2016, p. 915) argues that queer theory’s uniqueness stems from the way it ‘relies less on building or protecting a specific identity label than on critiquing heteronormative values and assumptions’.

Two prominent thinkers who have significantly influenced the development of queer theory are Judith Butler (1990, 1993) and Michael Foucault (1985, 1986). Butler argues that gender is not an inherent biological characteristic, but rather a social and performative construct. She challenges the notion that gender is a stable identity that we possess, and that it is instead something we continually perform and embody through our actions, languages, and behaviours. Foucault focused his work on the relationship between power, knowledge, and society. In the context of queer theory, his ideas are particularly relevant as he explored how power operates through disciplinary practices and institutions in order to influence our identities. Foucault also argues how society regulates and controls our bodies and desires. Sexuality is therefore not a private matter, but a product of historical and social forces that govern what is deemed acceptable. Foucault’s ideology interplays with the concept of ‘heteronormativity’ as explored in the literature review (Section 2.2 onwards). As noted throughout the literature review heteronormativity is a particularly quashing life factor for bisexuals, who are often hidden or prejudiced against, due to heteronormative societal norms.

Both Butler and Foucault have influenced queer theory by challenging the idea of fixed identities, unveiling power dynamics involved in the construction of gender and sexuality, and advocating for the recognition and acceptance of diverse identities. However, Butler (1993, p. 228) herself has argued that the term 'queer' itself should be 'redeployed, twisted' and never 'fully owned' in order to accommodate the experiences of those marginalised, as queer theory seems to miss a key player in the fight for disrupting binary norms: bisexuality. Callis (2009, pp. 213 - 216) contends that there is a 'lack of bisexual representation' in the work of queer theorists, and that in its attack of the heterosexual/homosexual binary, queer theory then pays no mind to those who identify outside of the very binary that queer theory chooses to condemn.

So why is bisexuality 'consistently ignored and rarely quoted' within queer theory? (Goldman, 1996, p. 176). Callis (2009, p. 220) proposes a number of theories; is it that queer theory has an ironic reliance on 'binary oppositions', despite its aim being to dismantle this very system? Does queer theory 'privilege certain sexualities', giving heterosexuality and homosexuality a precedence over other identities? Is bisexuality actually seen as part of the binary, and therefore 'not a force of deconstruction'? Lastly, is bisexuality simply seen as 'not sophisticated enough' to be a part of queer theory? Whatever the reason, 'a queer theory that misses bisexuality's querying of normative sexualities is a queer theory that is itself too mastered by the very normative and normalising binaries it seeks to unsettle' (Anderlini-D'Onofrio and Alexander, 2014, p. 7), and is perhaps a theory to be questioned in bisexuality-focused research.

Whilst I do believe queer theory has the potential to dismantle binary structures and encourage discussions around this, if queer theory continues to rely on such an 'other/or' relationship in which homosexuality and heterosexuality's existences rely on each other, and if bisexual voices

continue to be excluded, then I believe that it would be more appropriate to examine my research through a bisexual epistemological lens, utilising bisexuality as a ‘vantage point from which we can examine and deconstruct the bipolar framework of gender and sexuality’ (Däumer, 1992, p. 98). In relation to my specific area of study, I believe that adopting this bisexual theoretical viewpoint will allow me to share in a clear manner how the bisexual participants within my study navigate the complexities of their faith and sexuality and seek to deconstruct restrictive binaries in the CofE – without their voices being repressed by monosexuality. The use of bisexual theory will also enable me to champion bisexual voices in conversations with the *LLF* participants and will enable a platform that can encourage the importance of discussing bisexuality in a Christian context.

When we consider the language used in Section 5.8 of *Issues*, bisexuals within the CofE are near forced to consider which side of the binary to choose – with one option deemed far more acceptable than the other (Bernhardt-House, 2010; Enstedt, 2015; Toft, 2016). By engaging with bisexual theory, this research study will aim to challenge binary thinking that is so prevalent within both the Church and other epistemological frameworks, and in turn, embrace a more inclusive understanding of sexuality.

3.1.4 Summary of theoretical frameworks

This research study is underpinned by several key theoretical frameworks: lived religion, heteronormativity, interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), queer theory, and bisexual theory. Together, these frameworks provide a nuanced approach to understanding the intersection of bisexual identity, church policies, and the lived experiences of bisexual Christians within the Church of England (CofE).

Lived religion (see Section 2.1) emphasises how individuals experience and practice faith beyond formal doctrine. It highlights the social and cultural contexts that shape religious expression. Rather than focusing solely on institutional teachings, lived religion examines how faith is embodied in everyday life. For bisexual Christians, this perspective is crucial as it allows for an exploration of how they reconcile faith with their sexual identity, often in ways that do not align with official Church teachings.

Heteronormativity (see Section 2.2) refers to societal structures that assume and privilege heterosexuality as the norm. Within religious institutions, this manifests in policies and teachings that prioritise heterosexual relationships whilst marginalising non-heteronormative identities. The Church of England, like many religious institutions, has historically upheld binary understandings of sexuality, often excluding or erasing bisexual experiences. By analysing Church policies through the lens of heteronormativity, this study seeks to uncover the implicit biases that shape the faith experiences of bisexual Christians and the barriers they face in religious spaces.

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (see Section 3.1.2) is a qualitative research approach that prioritises individual lived experiences. It is particularly useful for exploring the unique and nuanced ways in which bisexual Christians navigate their faith. By focusing on personal narratives, IPA allows for a deep examination of how individuals make sense of their experiences in religious contexts. Its idiographic approach ensures that participants' voices are centered, rather than being subsumed into broader generalisations. Given the lack of research on bisexual Christians in the CofE, IPA provides a valuable methodological framework for capturing their distinct perspectives.

Queer theory (see Section 3.1.3) challenges traditional binaries and normative assumptions

about gender and sexuality. It critiques the privileging of heterosexuality and seeks to dismantle rigid identity categories. However as noted, queer theory has been critiqued for its lack of attention to bisexuality, often focusing on the binary opposition between heterosexuality and homosexuality. Despite this limitation, queer theory remains useful for examining how religious discourses construct and regulate sexuality, particularly in the context of the CofE.

Given the erasure of bisexuality within both religious and queer discourses, **bisexual theory** (see Section 3.1.3) offers an essential epistemological lens for this study. Bisexuality disrupts the heterosexual/homosexual binary, revealing the limitations of rigid sexual classifications. This study employs bisexual theory to challenge the binary frameworks upheld by the Church and to amplify bisexual voices within religious discourse. By positioning bisexuality as a distinct and valid identity, this framework ensures that the experiences of bisexual Christians are not overshadowed by monosexual perspectives.

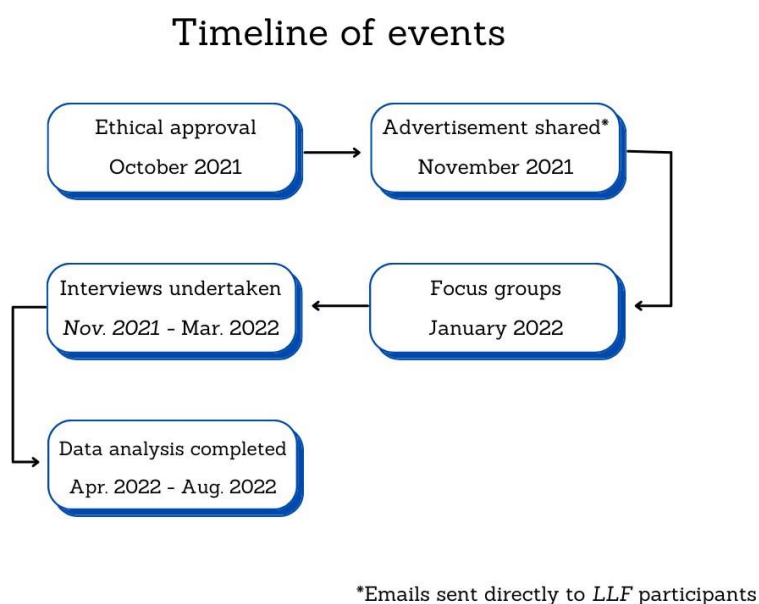
By integrating these theoretical frameworks, this study critically examines the intersection of bisexuality, lived religion, and heteronormative church policies. IPA provides a methodological foundation for exploring lived experiences, whilst bisexual theory and queer theory offer analytical tools for deconstructing binary thinking. Lived religion ensures a focus on personal faith practices beyond doctrine, and heteronormativity exposes the structural barriers that marginalise bisexual individuals. Together, these frameworks contribute to a richer and more inclusive understanding of bisexual Christians within the Church of England, highlighting the need for greater recognition and affirmation within religious communities.

3.2 Research Methods

3.2.1 Recruitment

Recruitment methods for this study differed for the two participant groups. In qualitative research, multiple factors (such as research objectives, access to participants, or target populations) may encourage researchers to employ a multi-methods approach. Access to the target participants was specifically relevant to this research as one participant group or ‘population’ target was arguably more accessible than the other. Figure 4, as shown below, highlights the timeline of events that created the overall recruitment process for this study.

Figure 5: Timeline of events¹⁷



¹⁷ As the *LLF* participants were sourced directly from a list of names on the Church of England website, there was no need to share the poster with this group. The process of contacting participants involved in *LLF* happened in conjunction with the social media recruitment process for bisexual Christian participants.

3.2.1a Recruiting the LLF participants

Recruitment of the *LLF* participants was conducted through a process of convenience sampling. Convenience sampling is a ‘non-probability sampling method’ (Stratton, 2021, p. 373) where researchers select participants based on various factors such as availability, ease of access, and willingness to participate, rather than using random selection. This method is often used when time, resources, or accessibility constraints make probability sampling impractical and/or when a specific population should be sampled. Golzar *et al* (2022, p. 73) state that convenience samples are ‘readily available’ when the researcher has access to the sample population; here *LLF* participants. The names of all individuals involved in the *LLF* Working Groups were easily accessible via an open list on the Church of England’s website. Time was then allocated to locate contact details for those on the list.

Due to my own set timeframes for recruitment, interview, and transcription, convenience sampling was particularly useful in this instance as it saved time that may otherwise have been taken up by random selection. However, convenience sampling did also provide some limitations for this recruitment group. As shown in Figure 6, only 22 of the 49 Working Group participants were contacted, and subsequently only five were interviewed¹⁸. For those listed within Figure 6, I was able to contact some potential participants directly, and for others, email communications were sent to personal assistants, or through church websites. In some instances, I was only able to find participants on public social platforms such as LinkedIn, and attempted contact through this platform. One such limitation was a conflict of interest, whereby I knew some of the Working Group participants personally from previous academic work. For other participants, I was unable to find any method of contact online, and in cases where I could, from others I received no response. There were further

¹⁸ There were 50 participants across the Working Groups, but at the time when recruitment for this study was taking place, one participant had passed away.

cases where participants responded with an interest in the research but chose to decline involvement in the study due to their academic backgrounds; for example, some *LLF* participants approached the project from historical or scientific fields, and therefore these individuals did not believe that they would be best suited to comment on the field of study.

It should be questioned as to whether I believe this limitation has affected the study; do I believe that if I had been able to contact every possible *LLF* participant that I would have received significantly more ‘yes’ responses? Whilst perhaps one or two more ‘yes’ responses may have been received, ultimately, I do not believe that this limitation has had a negative impact on this research. From the five *LLF* participants that I interviewed, I do believe that their answers were both valuable and worthwhile, and contributed immensely to the research and have helped to build a richer image of the relationship between bisexual Christian lived experiences, and the ways in which policy and publications (mis)understand these experiences.

Figure 6: Expressions of interest, and selected participants (*Living in Love and Faith* group)

In order to keep these individuals as anonymous as possible, and so that no guessing can be made by process of elimination, no names have been provided here, even for those who did not respond, or chose not to take part in this study.

The colours shown within the table are used throughout the analytical chapters within this thesis, so that it is clear which data belongs to which participant.

Name / Pseudonym	Participant code	First contact	Taking part?	Notes
<i>Not applicable – participants were not named within the study, nor were pseudonyms allocated to them.</i>	LLF001	04/11/2021	Y	
	LLF002	04/11/2021	Y	
	LLF003	09/11/2021	Y	
	LLF004	06/01/2022	Y	
	LLF005	24/03/2022	Y	
<i>Potential participant #06</i>	<i>Not applicable</i>	04/11/2021	N	
<i>Potential participant #07</i>		04/11/2021	N	
<i>Potential participant #08</i>		09/11/2021	N	
<i>Potential participant #09</i>		11/11/2021	N	<i>Continual lack of response</i>
<i>Potential participant #10</i>		11/11/2021	N	
<i>Potential participant #11</i>		11/11/2021	N	
<i>Potential participant #12</i>		11/11/2021	N	
<i>Potential participant #13</i>		03/01/2022	N	
<i>Potential participant #14</i>		03/01/2022	N	
<i>Potential participant #15</i>		03/01/2022	N	
<i>Potential participant #16</i>		03/01/2022	N	
<i>Potential participant #17</i>		03/01/2022	N	
<i>Potential participant #18</i>		24/03/2022	N	<i>Non-direct contact</i>
<i>Potential participant #19</i>		24/03/2022	N	<i>Non-direct contact</i>
<i>Potential participant #20</i>		24/03/2022	N	<i>Non-direct contact</i>
<i>Potential participant #21</i>		24/03/2022	N	
<i>Potential participant #22</i>		30/03/2022	N	

3.2.1b Recruiting bisexual Christian participants

Ethical approval for this research was granted at a time when some travel restrictions were still in place in the UK¹⁹. With this in mind and recognising the expediency and expansive reach afforded by social media, I opted to disseminate my research poster on the platforms Facebook and Twitter. Social media provides the opportunity for research to be completed in a ‘much faster [and] cheaper manner’ (Roberts, 2014, p. 3). Sites such as Facebook have multiple ‘features that are particularly suitable for research purposes’; Roberts (2014, p. 3) notes the presence of contacts, or ‘friends’, who can assist in sharing content and driving recruitment, and the accessibility of groups or pages in which to share a call for participants. I altered the settings on my social media profiles so that this poster could be shared publicly, which in turn created a snowball effect; by friends and colleagues sharing the poster, it reached individuals who may not have been ‘following’ me or been on my friends list. Gelinas *et al* (2017, p. 3) state that ‘social media are attractive in [a research] context because they may enable investigators both to reach wider segments of the population than may otherwise be accessible and to target individuals on the basis of personal information that, in many cases, allows researchers to infer their eligibility for particular studies’. I also chose to share my poster within various closed LGBT+ Christian groups that I was a member of.

It should be considered as to whether or not other recruitment methods would have been just as, if not more, successful. For example, flyers could have been distributed via University LGBT+ associations, within chaplaincies and churches, or a request for advertisement could have been sent to LGBT+ faith organisations. Whilst I do not doubt that these factors could have recruited further bisexual participants, and social media could have, to an extent, introduced a limitation, ultimately, I do not believe that my methods of recruitment limited my research study or caused a concerning

¹⁹ This study was accepted by the University of Birmingham’s Ethics Committee, reference ERN_20-1459.

level of detriment. Considering the following questions: was there a want or need to recruit more participants than those who came forward and were interviewed? Did interviewing via social media take such an extensive stretch of time that I believe my interview and subsequent analyses stages were affected? The answer to both of these questions is no: I successfully recruited a set number of participants within a 33-day period, leaving ample time to arrange interviews and, later, engage in data analysis. Whilst there are indeed benefits to all forms of recruitment for research studies, I do not believe a negative limitation was placed upon my research study through this use of recruitment.

The poster (see Appendix B) provided project specifics, including participation criteria, and encouraged prospective participants to contact the researcher via email. Whilst some individuals expressed interest through private messages on Twitter or Facebook, I maintained a consistent protocol; regardless of personal acquaintance, I requested that all interested parties formally communicate via email. This practice ensured the establishment of a documented trail for accountability purposes. Within two months of the poster's dissemination, 10 participants were selected from a pool of 20 individuals who had expressed interest. As noted in Section 3.1.2, smaller sample sizes can allow for deeper data analysis that focuses on particular nuances, ultimately leading to stronger and more detailed understandings of certain phenomena. Therefore, whilst more participants had expressed an interest in this research, I believed that limiting this participant group to 10 individuals would allow for the most suitable level of analysis to take place.

It should also be considered that, regrettably, not all individuals proved suitable for involvement in the research study, with some failing to meet the specified criteria outlined in the poster. Some participants did not fit within the designated age bracket – in this case, all rejected were over the age of 25; some lacked affiliation to the CofE, for example, worshipping in the Roman

Catholic Church or a smaller Christian denomination; and some did not identify as bisexual, for example, two participants identified as homosexual. The 10 participants chosen all identified their sexuality under the bisexual umbrella, and at the time of recruitment and interview, were somewhat presently affiliated with the CofE. These individuals were then provided with the requisite documentation to engage in the focus group and interview process.

Throughout the recruitment process, there were situations in which potential participants subsequently ceased communication with the researcher and would not respond to follow-up communications via email. These occurrences prompted the question, why do potential research participants choose to end their relationship with the research study in this way? Much research focuses on participant withdrawal once data has been collected (Gordon and Prohaska, 2006; Schaefer and Wertheimer, 2010; Thorpe, 2014), but there is limited research focusing on potential participants ceasing contact with the researcher before beginning a research study. With this in mind, I posit that several potential limitations may have contributed to this unusual pattern. Firstly, it could be argued that upon reflection, certain potential participants may have reconsidered their willingness to take part in the research study but struggled to articulate this to the researcher effectively (for example, participants may have harboured concerns that the researcher would be disappointed or angry in their withdrawal from the research study and might then be worried about expressing this). Secondly, in one particular instance where a potential participant reached out to the researcher via social media, it was observed that they shared mutual friends on this platform. In such a scenario, if the potential participant remained unaware of the relationship between the researcher and these mutual acquaintances, they may have felt apprehensive that the researcher could possibly divulge their participation to those mutual connections. Whilst such disclosures would contravene ethical guidelines, these worries are nonetheless understandable. Furthermore, certain potential participants

might have held concerns that despite assurances of anonymity, any data they disclosed could still somehow be traced back to them. In such instances, potential participants may have exhibited wariness towards the researcher, particularly if they lacked clarity regarding the researcher's positionality or intentions. Whilst I cannot be sure of the reasons that certain potential participants chose to cease contact, there could have been a myriad of reasons, which are important to consider. Figure 7 highlights expressions of interest for the bisexual participant study group, alongside those who were chosen to take part in this research.

Figure 7: Expressions of interest, and selected participants (bisexual Christian group)

Pseudonyms for the bisexual Christian participants were generated via <https://www.fakenamegenerator.com/>.

For those participants who did not take part, I have still chosen not to share their real first names, and as in Figure 6, will refer to them as 'potential participants'. The colours shown within the table are used throughout the analytical chapters within this thesis, so that it is clear which data belongs to which participant.

Name / Pseudonym	Participant code	First contact	Taking part?	Age at interview	Notes
'Katie'	BC001	01/11/2021	Y	25	
'Mia'	BC002	01/11/2021	Y	25	
'Eve'	BC003	08/11/2021	Y	24	
'Lauren'	BC004	10/11/2021	Y	24	
'Jessica'	BC005	18/11/2021	Y	21	
'Ruth'	BC006	29/11/2021	Y	21	
'Leah'	BC007	29/11/2021	Y	25	
'Danielle'	BC008	29/11/2021	Y	22	
'Ben'	BC010	03/12/2021	Y	23	
Not applicable	BC009	29/11/2021	N	Not applicable	Consented to study, then ceased contact
Potential participant #11	Not applicable	01/11/2021	N		
Potential participant #12		02/11/2021	N		
Potential participant 13		02/11/2021	N		
Potential participant #14		09/11/2021	N		
Potential participant #15		09/11/2021	N		
Potential participant #16		09/11/2021	N		
Potential participant #17		09/11/2021	N		
Potential participant #18		15/11/2021	N		
Potential participant #19		29/11/2021	N		
Potential participant #20		30/11/2021	N		

3.2.2 Developing participant questions

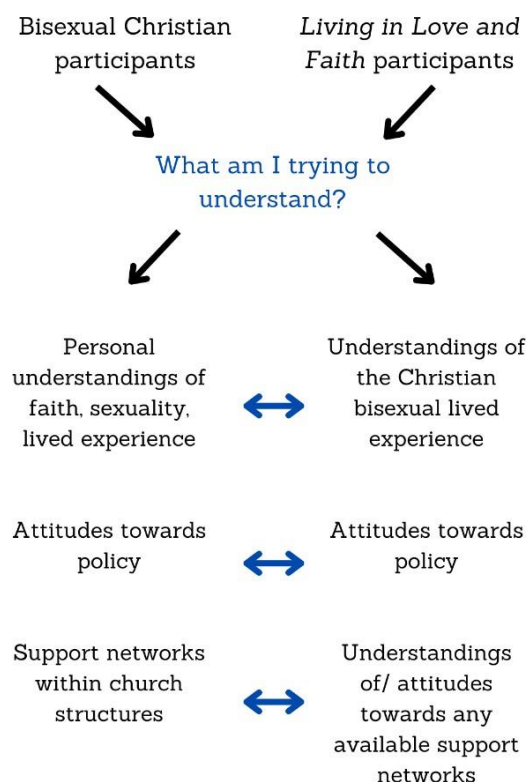
When developing questions which would enable the research statements to be explored, I needed to devise two distinct sets of questions for two markedly different participant groups. It was critical that my questions resonated with each group but also facilitated connections and links in understanding to gain an insight into the disparity that exists between bisexual Christian lived experience, and the understanding of those involved in Church scholarship.

I therefore questioned: 'what exactly am I trying to understand?', and 'how can I make sure my questions provide as much opportunity as possible to reflect the areas I am trying to examine?'. Reflecting on these inquiries guided me to establish that my questions - tailored for both participant groups - would be based on three overarching themes:

- i) understandings of lived experience
- ii) attitudes towards policies and Church scholarships
- iii) support networks within the CofE or broader Christian communities.

This is reflected in Figure 8 below.

Figure 8: The relationship between question groups



When developing my questions, it was critical to consider the gaps in research, and to ask questions that provided a platform for open discussion, creating ‘space for participants to narrate their experiences’ (Galletta and Cross, 2013, p. 47). Questions should be designed with flexibility in mind, recognising that they may evolve throughout the research process. As Creswell (2007, p.43) suggests, it is inevitable that questions may change throughout the research process, whether it be due to an ‘increased understanding of the problem’. Agee (2009, p. 432) posits that changes may ‘emerge from researchers’ capacities to examine their own roles and perspectives in the enquiry process’ - that is, continuously reflecting on our positionality as researchers, which may encourage a different perspective when examining questions. We may also question our relationships with our participants. Whilst it is important to avoid leading questions, establishing an initial question, or

small handful of set questions, provides a framework for approaching research gaps and maximising the interview process's effectiveness.

The questions asked of each participant group, and how they relate to each other to strengthen the triangulation of this study, are shown below. Some questions that were asked of the bisexual Christian participant group were developed during the focus group process: this has been highlighted, and the benefits of the focus groups, alongside the incorporation of the reading task question, are discussed in the following sections. Questions asked of the bisexual Christian participants are highlighted in **blue**, and their accompanying focus group questions, or additional focus group questions, are highlighted in **green**. A further analysis of the focus group process can be found in Section 3.2.2d. The questions asked of the *LLF* participants are highlighted in **red**.

The reading task question, although not explicitly noted in the table below, was asked of the bisexual participants at an appropriate moment during the discussions of Christian publications.

Figure 9: The relationships between the semi-structured interview questions

Overarching theme	Bisexual Christian and <i>LLF</i> questions
Understandings of lived experience	Q: How long have you been worshipping in the CofE and what would you say your faith life is like? <i>To link to above: Q: Were you raised in the CofE by your family/carers, or was worshipping a personal choice?</i> <i>Q: Were you part of any other Christian denomination before joining the CofE?</i> <i>Q: Do you feel as if your Church upbringing has had an impact on your attitudes towards your own sexuality, or sexuality as a whole?</i> <i>Q: Besides your home church, have you ever worshipped anywhere else? E.g., a university church, living away from home, etc.</i> Q: You identify as bisexual – please can you explain what that means to you? Q: Do you feel like your faith ‘identity’ and your sexual ‘identity’ ever come together, or do you choose to keep them separate? <i>To link to above: Q: In what ways do you feel ‘in touch’ with both sides of your identity?</i> <i>Q: Do you ever feel the need to hide your faith or sexuality in certain contexts/‘mask’ who you are, in order to protect your wellbeing?</i> <i>Q: The CofE still states that marriage is solely between a man and a woman and encourages celibacy for those in non-heterosexual relationships. What do you think about the Church’s attitude towards marriage, and how does this affect you as a bisexual?*</i> Q: Why were you chosen to be involved in the <i>Living in Love and Faith</i> project?[†]
Attitudes towards policies and Church scholarships	Q: Are you aware of CofE documents such as <i>Issues in Human Sexuality</i> or <i>Living in Love and Faith</i>? If so, what do these documents mean to you or do you have any thoughts on them? <i>To link to above: Q: Are you aware of the Church of England Evangelical Council’s video ‘A Beautiful Story’? What did you think of it?</i> <i>Q: Are you aware of any other denominational documents/videos/courses etc that talk about human sexuality?</i>

	Q: What are your thoughts on previous Church of England documents such as <i>Issues in Human Sexuality</i> or <i>The Working Group on Human Sexuality</i>? Q: You may be aware that <i>Issues</i> describes bisexuals as ‘promiscuous’ and states that if they choose to be in a same-sex relationship, they must remain celibate (see Section 5.8). What are your thoughts on this? Q: Do you think that the language in documents such as <i>Issues</i> or <i>Living in Love and Faith</i> accurately reflect the lived experience of bisexuals in the Church of England?
Support networks within the CofE or broader Christian communities	Q: Do you feel, as a young bisexual Christian, that there is support for you within the Church? Q: As a bisexual Christian, do you feel like you have to seek affirmation in the Church for who you are? Can you explain why you do/do not feel you need to do this? Q: Do you feel like you have allies within the Church? Or, contrasting this, do you ever feel like you’ve experienced explicit biphobia within the Church? Q: As Christians we believe in the importance of unity - how, as a bisexual, do you think we could achieve unity in the Church, between ourselves and those who question our validity and existence? Q: Do you believe that there are support networks in place for those who identify as bisexual within the Church of England?

**This question could also apply to the theme of ‘attitudes towards policies and Church scholarships’, when considering biblical language or other Church documentation such as *Living in Love and Faith*.*

†The data provided in this question was used as little as possible during analysis, and most LLF participants asked to have this information removed from their transcript. The question was asked to provide the interviewer with the background as to why participants were requested to take part in LLF, which in turn helped to develop further conversational questions, alongside providing insights into other topics which may then have been relevant for discussion.

In order to gather comprehensive data from the bisexual participants concerning policy and Church scholarship, I determined that it would also be beneficial to incorporate a reading task question. Since I could not presume that any of my participants were familiar with, or had encountered, any CofE scholarship, engaging the participants in a reading task would provide an opportunity to introduce them to Church attitudes. Subsequently, I could then compare and contrast their responses with those of the *LLF* participant group, who have been actively engaged in producing such documentation. After deliberation, I decided the most appropriate piece of Christian text to use for the task would be Section 5.8 of *Issues*. This passage, thus far, provides the most comprehensive status regarding bisexuality in Church literature and, whilst over 30 years old, still holds significant impact in the discussion of bisexual understandings in the CofE.

3.2.2a Why complete a reading task?

There is limited data that exists regarding the use of a reading task within qualitative interview processes; however, examining other forms of visual aids or ‘prompts’ can provide insights into the benefits of utilising external sources in semi-structured interviewing. I argue that undertaking a reading task enhanced the data collected during the interview process, and in the case of this research area, allowed for a gap that currently exists to be bridged.

As has been stated thus far throughout this thesis, the aim of this research is to highlight the disparity that exists between what is known, and what will be learnt throughout this process, about bisexual lived experience in the CofE and what we understand the Church to believe, through an examination of publications, alongside the thought processes of those involved in the creation of these publications. By engaging with participants involved in the *LLF* initiative and their past and present knowledge of policies and publications, I argue that we are laying the groundwork for the bridge we

seek to construct. This process provides us with valuable insights into the viewpoints of individuals who have extensively studied, evaluated, and contributed to the evolution and comprehension of Church publications on human sexuality – what has been referred to as the ‘upper echelons’ of this research endeavour.

However, to further fortify this bridge and narrow the gap between policy, publications, and lived experience, I argue that the implementation of a reading task in the bisexual interviews was critical. By presenting a piece of sexuality documentation to the participants whose lived experience we are seeking to understand, we gain an insight into how bisexual Christians respond to both Church publications and the language and attitudes represented within them, and in turn, how this enhances, affects, or even discredits their lived experiences. I firmly state that by endeavouring to bridge these divides and identify disparities, this research will then provide a deeper understanding of how the Church can improve its relationships with bisexuality. In this instance, my goal is to comprehend the perspectives of those involved in the creation of these documents; perhaps they are satisfied with the existing language and frameworks, or perhaps they feel the need to advocate for significant change. As stated, I also aim to understand the perspectives of those impacted by said documents. Through this process, I argue that we can pinpoint key areas that require readjustment, and in time, foster greater inclusivity and acceptance within the CofE. Whilst only a small element of the overall interview process, I argue that the implementation of a reading task will play a vital role in developing knowledge of the relationships between lived experiences, and Christian policy.

3.2.2b The benefits of a reading task: prompt and stimuli

Alongside the wider arguments stated above, I feel that there are further benefits to introducing a reading task into the interview process. Page *et al* (2022, p. 1) argue that ‘visual stimuli are

increasingly used [...] as a qualitative research method’, generating ‘different’ or ‘richer’ responses as opposed to just text or language. Page *et al* trialed the use of images against text cards to gather responses from their participants and found that pictures produced more detailed and informed responses. Despite acknowledging this study’s persuasive argument that text is more ‘fixed in meaning’ compared to images, I remained convinced that my selection of text alone would elicit rich responses, due to the robust language employed in the extract. I also argue that through my participant’s ability to relate the text to their own lives and experiences, this would only emphasise the significant role that the text will play in stimulating such insightful feedback. I assert my argument is supported by the work of Törrönen (2002, p. 345), who argues that the use of a stimulus text provides a grounding of interpretation, which an interview or research participant can then build off: ‘the interviewee, in turn, re-presents a new interpretation of it and thus continues the never-ending process of semiosis’. By providing participants with a textual piece to read and giving context to the research, the text is then made ‘perceptible in such a way that the interviewees, through interpreting the stimulus text, are ‘empowered’ to express their social experience and cultural knowledge of the issue under question’.

Furthermore, by using Section 5.8 from *Issues* as a prompt, I argue that both a strong and organised narrative was created for the interview process. Prompts are recognised as ‘helpful anchors to structure narrative’ (Page *et al.*, 2022, p. 5), serving a valuable purpose in semi-structured interviews by preventing the conversation from veering too far from the planned path of discussion. Instead of introducing a reading task, an alternative approach could have been to ask the participants a straightforward question, for example, ‘can you share your thoughts on a piece of CofE literature regarding sexuality that you have read?’. However, I contend that this approach would have been less advantageous. For example, posing such a broad question may have been overwhelming to some participants, potentially hindering their ability to respond effectively. Secondly, considering the lack

of explicit policy addressing bisexuality within the CofE, asking participants to discuss sexuality policy in general may have led to tangential discussions. This could have then resulted in a ‘rabbit hole’ scenario, where interviews veered into areas of information only partially relevant to the study. For instance, discussions about *LLF* could have dominated due to its recent publication, despite its limited coverage of bisexuality. As a result, the data obtained may not have directly contributed to the intended focus of my research and could have retracted from valuable time in which more relevant themes could have been discussed. Therefore, by providing participants with Section 5.8, I argue that they were provided with an anchor – a grounding point or stimulus – that prompted them to contemplate their sexuality within the context of the CofE and their broader experiences as bisexual individuals. This passage served as a catalyst for participants to discuss aspects of their experiences that they may not have otherwise broached. Moreover, it afforded them a safe and controlled way to respond to documentation and policy, offering a structured framework in which they could articulate their thoughts and feelings. As noted by Page *et al* (2022, p. 5), ‘prompts enable[d] a process to identify personally relevant themes and a structure to communicate thoughts and feelings in an open and less confronting way than verbal interviews alone’.

3.2.2c Potential pitfalls and ethical considerations

Despite the positive factors that can be attributed to incorporating a reading task into this research, it is vital to recognise that certain ethical considerations must be acknowledged, alongside potential pitfalls to the research as a result of this activity. Firstly, the bisexual participants may have experienced a trauma-based response to the text; this could be the case if seeing the text for the first time, but also for those who had read the text in the past and not responded positively to its wording. Through feelings of upset or discomfort, the wellbeing of the participants could be impacted, alongside their trust in the study. Considering this, participants who were upset by the language may, in turn,

provide distorted feedback, focusing more on the upsetting nature of the text rather than its broader implications. This may, finally, have led some participants to withdraw from the study, reducing the sample size and affecting the quality of the data.

These potential pitfalls relate to, and emphasise, certain ethical considerations for the use of a reading task. The following ethical considerations were regarded when planning this reading task, and were responded to in the following ways:

- 1. Informed consent and a right to withdraw:** When presenting what may be regarded as particularly distressing content, participants should be informed upfront about the nature of the text, its potentially upsetting content, and its purpose in the study. Transparency is crucial for ethical integrity. Therefore, once a decision had been made to incorporate a reading task, participants were informed of this change and what the reading task would be. They were given the option to read the excerpt before the interview, if they wished, or if they were happy to, they could still approach the reading task 'blind'. Participants were also given the option to withdraw from the study if they accessed the text and did not find it to be suitable, and were further informed that they could request to skip this part of the interview process or withdraw within the interview if necessary. Whilst, as noted above, this could impact the sample size and data quality, participant comfort and emotional safety was the priority.
- 2. Confidentiality:** There may be a worry amongst participants that particularly emotional responses would be recorded and, in some way, attributed back to them. In collaboration with ensuring overall confidentiality through pseudonyms and the removal of potentially identifying information, participants were ensured that, if in any way concerned, their reactions, feelings,

and feedback will be kept confidential.

3. **Pre-reading briefings and trigger warnings:** If participants have chosen not to access the text before the interview, or have, for example, accessed the text in the past but forgotten the context, an immediate introduction to the text with no pre-context could cause undue and unnecessary distress. Therefore, before completing the reading task, participants were provided with context to the text (for example when and why it was written, and its use today), the relevance of the text to the study was explained, alongside finally outlining why it had been selected. Participants were also given a ‘trigger warning’ regarding any particular language (for example, the end of Section 5.8, which is seen by some to allude to a recommendation of conversion therapy).
4. **Debriefing:** Completing a potentially distressing task, and then immediately moving onto the end of the interview or other questions, may be upsetting for participants, who are not given adequate space to discuss their feelings or responses. If the interview were to continue, this could lead to potential hostility from the participant, or a request to finish the interview early. Therefore, it is vital that participants are given space after the task to discuss their feelings and thoughts in a supportive and nonjudgmental setting. This space was offered to the bisexual participants before continuing with the final question of the interview, and as much time as needed was provided.
5. **Providing follow-up support:** When a researcher plans for participants to engage with potentially distressing material, or to discuss experiences that may cause upset, it is vital that when seeking ethical approval, the researcher is aware of these issues and how, therefore, they

will ensure participants have access to support moving forward. As shown in the research recruitment documents, participants were encouraged to access support through trusted networks or turn to national mental health support networks if they required further intervention. Similarly, after each interview, participants were offered the opportunity for follow-up discussions, emotional check-ins, or further additional support signposting to provide space to process their experience.

Considering the above ethical deliberations and potential pitfalls allowed me to plan the reading task through a trauma-informed lens. I was able to provide a space for bisexual participants that allowed them to freely and safely express their emotions and responses to the language in Section 5.8 of *Issues*.

3.2.2d The introduction of a focus group

When planning to recruit and subsequently interview for this research study, I had not planned to include a focus group. However, after careful consideration, I decided that including a focus group within this research would encourage a richer data set that further elevates the voice of the bisexual participants and would allow a better understanding of their ‘experiences and beliefs’ (Gill *et al.*, 2008, p. 293), alongside creating a platform in which the participants could contribute to the formulation of questions, encouraging further engagement with the study. It should be noted here that a focus group was not used as part of the *LLF* interview process, in order to allow these participants to remain completely anonymous to each other.

Focus groups can be a powerful tool in qualitative research for several reasons. By bringing participants together, the researcher is creating an environment in which participants can ‘influence each other through their answers to the ideas and contributions during the discussion’ (de Freitas *et al.*, 1998,

p. 2). If a focus group is tailored to be a supportive and open environment, participants can be given a platform in which they feel safe to share their opinions on the overall research, alongside what other participants have to say. Speaking ‘more freely without fear of repercussions’ (Gill *et al.*, 2008, p. 293) can lead to a richer and more powerful data set.

Upon devising the interview questions for the bisexual interviews, whilst I deemed my positionality may aid in formulating pertinent questions that would capture the lived experiences of the bisexual participants, I recognised that there is an inherent diversity in every bisexual Christian’s journey and acknowledged the possibility that certain topics, which I may not have deemed significant, could hold significant impact for this group. Moreover, recognising the intimate nature of this research endeavour, I judged it imperative to foster an environment where the participants felt empowered to contribute meaningfully beyond merely providing responses to predetermined questions. I felt it critical to consider the research gaps, and how these could further be addressed. Therefore, I opted to convene a focus group, which would afford the bisexual participants the opportunity to offer insights and feedback on the proposed questions, alongside suggesting new avenues for discussion. By engaging in this collaborative process, I aimed to ensure that the research not only reflected the diverse experiences of bisexual Christians but also fostered a sense of ownership and agency among participants, elevating the study beyond a mere interview platform.

Due to participant availability, I conducted two focus groups. Not all participants were available for the dates provided, and so seven of the nine bisexual participants took part; those who could not attend were informed of the structure that the focus groups could take and were given the opportunity to provide any comments or feedback via email that they would have shared in the group. I argue that conducting these focus groups provided a variety of benefits to the study, including:

1. **Flexibility:** Focus groups can be flexible and adaptable and allow the researcher the space to adjust their approach to their study in real time, based on the responses of their participants. The flexibility of the focus group format allows the researcher to ‘adapt to the flow of discussion’ and ‘adjust to participant’s requests during the group’ (Nyumba *et al.*, 2018 p.29). In this research, I was able to adapt the questions at the request of the participants by adding more questions in, extending current questions with smaller sub-topics, and removing some questions all together. As conversation flowed between the groups, I was also able to adapt any upcoming questions or comments I had, to allow the participants to share as much information as possible.
2. **Cost-effectiveness:** Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, alongside the geographical spread of the participants, I chose to keep all research-based activity, including the focus groups, online. This eliminated any costs that may have been incurred through hiring a venue for the focus group, and subsequent travel that would have accompanied this (Gaiser, 2008, p.291).
3. **Group dynamics:** Providing participants with the opportunity to engage in a focus group facilitated the emergence of a group dynamic that would not have been present in individual interviews alone. This approach afforded me a deeper comprehension of the participants as I observed their interactions, influences, and mutual opinions, which unveiled beliefs or attitudes that might not have surfaced during one-on-one interviews (Seal, Bogart, and Ehrhardt, 1998, p. 254).

Conducting focus groups provided me with the unique opportunity to share my research with the participants across a different platform. In turn, facilitating these groups allowed the introduction

of new perspectives, and revealed concerns, ideas or themes that were not initially considered. This allowed me the space to refine current interview questions, and introduce new ones, that focused on the most relevant issues to my participants.

3.2.3 Interviews

According to Rabionet (2011, p. 563), ‘qualitative interviewing is a flexible and powerful tool to capture the voices and the ways people make meanings of their experiences’. Amongst various qualitative interview styles, the semi-structured interview format stands out as a popular choice. Brinkmann (2014, p. 286) argues that ‘compared to structured interviews, semi-structured interviews can make better use of the knowledge-producing potentials of dialogue by allowing much more leeway for following up on whatever angles are deemed important by the interviewee’. This style of interview also affords participants the opportunity to contribute additional insights that they deem relevant or allows space for them to simply discuss wider thoughts and ideas, whilst offering researchers the flexibility to outline a base or general topic area, ensuring that the research study remains anchored within its broader research parameters. This approach provides a solid foundation for sharing experiences and fostering rapport between the researcher and the participant.

Covid-19 introduced new ways of working and researching for individuals worldwide. With offices, workspaces and labs closed to those whose work was not deemed ‘essential’, and with personal meetings – for a time – restricted to family, close friends, or those within our ‘bubbles’, completing interviews in person was not going to be an easy task. Boland *et al* (2022, p. 1) ask the question, ‘how do qualitative researchers collect meaningful and representative data, and engage in action research, when constrained by cost, distance or unforeseen events?’. As noted when considering both focus groups and geographical spread, I posited that the most effective format for interviewing would be

through an online platform; this would keep both myself and my participants safe, would be cost-effective, and would still allow for active semi-structured interviewing. As Dean and Wakefield (2014, p. 605) argue, online platforms can alleviate the distance that exists between participant and researcher, significantly reduce travel costs, and enable researchers to ‘contact participants who may otherwise be difficult to reach, such as the less physically mobile, socially isolated or people living in dangerous areas’. Despite this article being written 6 years before the first Covid-19 lockdowns were announced in the UK, Deakin and Wakefield’s awareness of the benefits of using social platforms to access those who are socially isolated is relevant today.

3.2.3a Conducting and transcribing interviews

Prior to commencing the interview process, I knew I would need to compare the various benefits or setbacks of differing online video-calling platforms. As Gray *et al* (2020, p. 1293) underscore, ‘with the number of platforms available, the researcher needs to decide which program best fits their research needs, depending on budget, user ease, administrative options, and researcher’s level of comfort with the platform’. The paramount considerations in selecting a platform for interviews were ensuring reliability, safeguarding against unnecessary data sharing, and ensuring ease of use for both myself and the participants.

Following an assessment of multiple platforms to evaluate recording capabilities, meeting security, and transcription features, I narrowed my choices to two options: Microsoft Teams and Zoom. I initially opted for Teams because of my familiarity with it, having utilised the platform extensively throughout 2020 in a youth group setting to deliver training. However, I considered Zoom as a viable alternative. Further research shows Zoom to be the more popular choice for qualitative research, offering ‘several notable advantages to qualitative researchers conducting online video conference

interviews' (Gray *et al.*, 2020, p. 1294). Zoom offers various safety features which are appealing to researchers. For example, meetings can be password-protected, links to interviews can be made available solely to the participant, and recordings are saved on a password-protected storage platform. When considering recordings, there are different ways in which data can be collected; for example, if a participant does not wish to have their image captured on file, the interview can be recorded as an audio-only file, providing an extra level of confidentiality. As a comparison, Teams only offers this function on their paid tiers (Santhosh, Rojas, and Lyons, 2021, p. 179). If a researcher is also using an external transcription service, using audio-only files therefore means that data can be shared, without compromising the confidentiality agreed with the participant (Gray *et al.*, 2020, pp. 1294-5).

I trialed Teams for the first two interviews undertaken but ultimately decided that this was not a suitable platform to use. Due to technological settings applied by my research institution, I was unable to record the meetings and had to use a voice recording facility on my computer. In order to transcribe, I then played back the audio recordings, whilst using the Microsoft Dictate function to create the first draft of a transcript. I realised that this was not the most effective format to be using and switched to Zoom, taking advantage of the in-built live transcription service, which automatically generated a transcript that was available straight after the interview.

Utilising video conferencing for my interviews was both 'a convenient and safe alternative to in-person qualitative research' (Santhosh, Rojas, and Lyons, 2021, p. 177) and provided many benefits. Completing interviews online allowed a flexibility which would not have necessarily existed face-to-face, as interviews could be undertaken during anti-social hours (e.g. in the middle of the workday, or later in the evening), and eliminated any transport costs that would have been incurred (Santhosh, Rojas, and Lyons, 2021, p. 177). Whilst I had only allocated an hour for each interview (this was

expressed in the participant paperwork), if participants wished to talk for longer and share more ideas, there was more scope for this to be possible; if a participant was being interviewed at home, once the interview was complete, they could simply shut down their computer, and continue with their day. This would not have been possible in person due to, for example, a participant needing to return to work or catch public transport. However, this may incur future limitations; platforms such as Zoom, as paid tiers are introduced, are changing what facilities can be accessed by those on certain tiers. For example, in mid-2022, Zoom chose to end its unlimited one-to-one interview sessions, limiting sessions to 40 minutes. Researchers should therefore consider, when deciding on an online interviewing platform, which has the facilities to best meet the demands of the interview process.

3.2.4 Coding and thematically analysing data

Lochmiller (2021, p. 2029) states that ‘qualitative research is a diverse field that employs a variety of analytic techniques to produce an understanding of rich data sets’, with one of the more common techniques being thematic analysis. Thematic analysis can be characterised as a dual process, encompassing both the identification of patterns within data and the creation of codes based on these patterns. Delving deeper, thematic analysis also ‘often requires analysts to move beyond frequencies to ascertain the salience and meaning of the underlying dataset’ (Lochmiller, 2021, p. 2029). A common analytical approach when developing themes is IPA: my particular IPA process is noted in the section below. When considering the most effective approach to analysing my data sets, I determined that solely relying on an organic, immersed reading of the data and selecting themes based on personal relevance would not suffice. Two primary reasons influenced this decision. Firstly, as previously discussed, I position myself both as an insider and an outsider within the research space, which entails immersing myself in the experiences of my bisexual participants whilst maintaining a professional distance due to differing experiences. Despite striving for impartiality in my data analysis, there is a

risk that my personal biases or emotional reactions could influence the selection of themes or data points, potentially leading to skewed interpretations. This could compromise the thorough and equitable analysis of all data. Secondly, upon reflecting on the gaps identified in the research field during the literature review, engaging in a personally focused analysis could inadvertently lead me to seek out themes that I perceive to be lacking in the existing literature. This might unconsciously bias the analysis, therefore overlooking important aspects of the data.

Therefore, I made the decision to incorporate the use of a computer-based analysis software to provide a second analytical layer to this study. Whilst I do not believe that any form of analysis can be completely unbiased, utilising analytical software can provide both ‘rigour’ and ‘add to the validity’ of research results (Welsh, 2002, *no page*). Whilst Welsh carries on to warn that ‘this searching needs to be married with manual scrutiny techniques so that the data are in fact thoroughly interrogated’, these platforms can still assist with completing ‘multiple qualitative analysis functions [...] including sorting and filtering raw data, discovering and building relationships along data’ and ‘assigning and defining themes’ (Phillips and Lu, 2018, p. 104). Phillips and Lu here refer to the platform Nvivo, which I chose to utilise within my analytical processes.

3.2.4a Personal thematic analysis

Once all transcripts were completed, I first undertook a level of personal thematic analysis. The structure of my analytical process is based on IPA, the underlying thematic framework within this thesis:

- 1. Familiarisation:** ‘The first step of IPA analysis involves immersing oneself in some of the original data [...] [and] would involve reading and re-reading’ (Smith, Flowers, and Larkin, 2022, p. 78). When first approaching my transcripts, I was acutely aware that some familiarisation

would occur upon reading due to ‘having been present during data collection’ (Jamieson, 2016, p. 400). However, in order to begin a successful process of data analysis, I deemed it pertinent to completely refamiliarise myself with the content at hand. I therefore undertook a two-fold process of familiarisation and immersion, taking the opportunity to ‘read, read and read [the data] again’, placing the participants at the focus of this stage of analysis (Smith, Flowers, and Larkin, 2022, p. 78). Familiarising myself with the transcripts also allowed me to begin forming initial impressions of what the potential arising themes may be.

2. **‘Exploratory noting’** (Smith, Flowers, and Larkin, 2022, p. 79): Throughout the process of immersion, I undertook what is known as ‘exploratory noting’; that is, freely adding to comments to both the transcripts and my research diary, without a current oversight of themes. The aim of these actions is ‘to produce a comprehensive and detailed set of notes and comments on the data’ (Smith, Flowers, and Larkin, 2022, p. 79).
3. **Constructing statements, or identifying broad themes:** At this stage, the researcher is expected to identify statements that can be formed from participant data or develop a table of broader themes. After immersing myself in all transcripts and undertaking a process of exploratory noting, I began to build a table in which wider themes or ideas (for example Church policy, family life, identity navigation etc.) were noted.
4. **Considering connections:** The IPA process next encourages the researcher to consider a process of ‘charting, or mapping [...] how you think the statements fit together’ (Smith, Flowers, and Larkin, 2022, p. 90). At this stage, I began to input data from the transcripts into

the table, under the umbrella of wider themes recognised.

Further reading and discovery of new connections allowed themes to be refined and broken down into subthemes. This iterative process ensured that the rich complexity of the data was captured. Cross-referencing within both the subthemes and wider themes allowed for a detailed triangulation of the data. As a final step, I chose to identify any deviant cases. Whilst this is not an analytical step often identified in IPA, I understood it would be important to pay heed to the data that did not necessarily fit into any particular theme or pattern, as these cases are valuable for understanding the limitations of a study's themes. Engaging with the data through the above process allowed me to take a personal approach to data analysis, extracting deeper insights, and uncovering layers of meaning, which allowed me to begin building a more profound understanding of my participant's experiences.

3.2.4b Software thematic analysis

As previously stated, whilst I found that organically coding the data offered a comprehensive understanding of the participant's experiences, and uncovered nuances or deviant cases that may have been more apparent to a human observer than a computer-based software, I remained conscious of the potential for unconscious biases influencing my interpretation. Consequently, I conducted a second round of thematic analysis using NVivo. This analysis was undertaken in the following way:

1. Transcripts were individually uploaded to the NVivo software.
2. All transcripts were 'auto coded' to search for themes: in total, the software detected 695 'themes'.
3. As the software is trained to search for words and phrases that appear multiple times, some themes were classed as defunct e.g., NVivo picking up on filler words such as 'like' or 'um'

and marking them as themes, or themes being created with only one piece of data e.g., one word or phrase. These themes were examined for deviant cases and removed as necessary.

4. The remaining themes were then examined to remove quotations from myself as the researcher. If any themes only contained quotations from myself e.g., where a theme may have been created simply because of a question I asked all of the participants, then these themes were also removed. NVivo themes and subthemes were cross-checked with my own themes to examine overlap or potential differences²⁰.

Despite being a new user of Nvivo software, I found it very advantageous for conducting a second round of thematic analysis for several reasons. Firstly, the software proved to be both fast and efficient, enabling me to organise and categorise data effortlessly. Secondly, its flexibility allowed for easy adaptation as new data patterns emerged, with the capability to revise and reorganise theme codes as needed. Additionally, NVivo offers functionalities for code searching and retrieval, which proved invaluable for linking quotations or ideas within the data. Lastly, the visualisation tools provided by NVivo allowed me to visually map the relationships between codes, themes, and data segments, thereby facilitating the identification of connections and patterns that may not have been immediately apparent.

3.2.5 Data protection and storage

Protecting participant data and upholding good data management is crucial 'in both qualitative and quantitative research because it ensures the truthfulness of the data and protects research participants' (Lin, 2009, p. 132). In research studies that handle sensitive and personal content, participants should have the confidence that the researcher is handling their data in a safe and secure

²⁰ NVivo thematic tables can be found in Appendix J.

manner and that there is no risk of data being mishandled or leaked, as this could lead to negative consequences for the participants.

There are multiple reasons as to why data security should be a priority in qualitative research, starting with trust and informed consent. Informed consent is an 'ethical and legal requirement' in research involving human participants, and involves participants being exposed to, and given the opportunity to understand, all aspects of a research study before potentially beginning a trial, being interviewed etc., so that they can make an informed decision about whether or not to take part in a study (Nijhawan *et al.*, 2013, p. 134). Through informed consent, participants are also of the understanding that their data will be used for a specific purpose. Protecting their data upholds the trust established between researchers and participants and ensures that participants' original intentions and agreements are respected.

Dependent on the location where data is collected and/or analysed, there will undoubtedly be data protection laws to adhere to, such as the European Union's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), implemented into UK law via the Data Protection Act in 2018. Researchers must acquaint themselves with relevant legal requirements concerning data to ensure compliance with data protection and storage protocols. By protecting participant data, this ensures that the data remains reliable and accurate over time, and prevents corruption, loss, or unauthorised alterations.

In research studies that involve sensitive topics, such as personal information about a participant's health, family arrangements, or sexual identity, participants should be given the option of anonymity to protect their identity both within the research process and beyond it; 'anonymisation of data is generally considered the most important component of data protection' (Kaspar and Müller-

Böker, 2006, p. 128). Researchers must try to avoid ‘deductive disclosure’; that is, a situation in which ‘the traits of individuals or groups make them identifiable in research reports’ (Kaiser, 2009, p. 1632). For example, even if a participant’s name is removed, but they referred to a specific tutor in their college, alongside where they lived, it is possible that the identity of the participant could be concluded. Considering deductive disclosure before beginning my data collection immediately led me to offer my bisexual participants anonymity, and all were encouraged to adopt a pseudonym, which were produced via a random name generator website. My *LLF* participants were not pseudonymised, but were instead given coded titles of LLF001, LLF002 etc., and gender-neutral pronouns used, to further protect their identities.

When protecting participant data, contextual identifiers should also be considered. Removing a name to protect a participant does not provide complete cover, as further elements such as home or living location, educational institutions, or facilities accessed (e.g., churches, local attractions, social groups) could also identify the participant. However, whilst removing names of towns or cities, universities, or schools, will provide extra protection to the participant, researchers must also consider whether the ‘original meaning of the data’ will be ‘destroyed’ through removing too much information (Kaiser, 2009, p. 1635). A participant referring to a particular church or school may be vital to understanding a profound developmental change in their life, and removing the name could then cause the data to sound rough and irregular, potentially rendering the data meaningless. In the case of my research study, some of the bisexual participants mentioned specific churches, life events, student groups, towns, universities, and so on, all factors that could in some way identify them. To make sure that the meaning of this rich data was not lost, I made conscious efforts to not overly redact if including quotations that may have referenced a local area or specific place of worship. If quotations arose where there would be an element of over-redacting, which could make their statement confusing or hollow, at

that point I would question if the quotation was suitable to use in my data analysis. A similar process was undertaken with the *LLF* participants, where no data from the first question (regarding how they became involved with the project) was used, and as with the bisexual participants, any major names or life events were redacted.

3.3 Prior considerations to research methods

3.3.1 Considerations prior to project

Before designing the research methods discussed above, the following factors were considered in order to make sure that this study could be undertaken in the most effective manner possible, and in order to create a space in which a rich and varied pool of data could be collected:

1. Positionality, and the use of a research diary in this reflective process
2. The Covid-19 pandemic, and ethical considerations during this time
3. Participant age, and questions of parental consent
4. The use of research incentives
5. Gender bias within participant-based research

3.3.1a Positionality

Qualitative social research is ‘inevitably human’ (Perry, Thurston, and Green, 2004, p. 138), therefore researchers often find themselves emotionally engaged with their findings, particularly if they perceive themselves as insiders to their research. According to Nelson (2020, p. 912), ‘the emotion of the researcher cannot be divorced from the processes of research when researcher emotions actively transform and affect data’. Therefore, it is crucial for researchers to effectively manage their emotions and mental wellbeing during both the research process and within a broader academic context. These

aspects were carefully considered throughout my research journey.

3.3.1b Placing oneself: deciding on insider/outsider status

Bourke (2014, p. 1) argues that ‘research represents a shared space, shaped by both researcher and participants. As such, the identities of both researcher and participants have potential to impact the research process’. This argument underpins some of the key questions that researchers must ask themselves throughout their research; who am I as a researcher? What presence, power and position do I have in this situation? Am I an insider or outsider to this research area, and should I inform my participants of my position? Holding insider status in a specific research domain offers researchers ‘a deepened appreciation of relevant issues as well as a heightened sensitivity towards the perceptions of those under scrutiny’ (Perry, Thurston, and Green, 2004, p. 138). Their familiarity with participant experience facilitates the development of trust, potentially resulting in a more comprehensive data collection. However, insider researchers must exercise caution to prevent becoming overly attached or emotionally invested in the research context, as this may hinder their ability to maintain objectivity and impartiality during data analysis. Outside researchers, whilst in a better position to emotionally detach themselves and provide a more neutral reaction to the data, may not fully have the ‘capacity to appreciate the[ir] experience’ of their participants, making it harder for them to be trusted, therefore inhibiting participants from fully disclosing their experiences (Dwyer and Buckle, 2009, p. 57).

Positioning myself as the researcher in this study prompted reflections on the nuanced space between insider and outsider status, questioning whether it is feasible for a researcher to occupy a ‘middle ground’ (Dwyer and Buckle, 2009, p. 60). Moreover, this research journey has not only prompted inquiries into my researcher identity but also into my queer and religious identities. It is evident that the rigid ‘binary distinctions’ that separate insider and outsider statuses are ‘often

meaningless' (Nelson, 2020, p. 913), as an insider researcher may not share every identity trait with all participants recruited. Similarly, whilst outsider researchers may not be able to identify fully with their subjects, it does not preclude them from demonstrating empathy towards their participants. Embracing the space of 'paradox, ambiguity, and ambivalence' (Dwyer and Buckle, 2009, p. 60) in between the binaries of inside and outside is ultimately where I located myself within my research.

When preparing for fieldwork, I chose to ask myself the following questions:

1. If and when occupying the space between insider and outsider research, do I feel that I will be able to emotionally distance myself as and when necessary to the study, in order to protect the participants, and my mental health as a researcher?
2. Will it be appropriate and/or beneficial to the research to reveal my personal questions to the participants? As I am not expecting the participants to identify 'perfectly' as bisexual and Christian, will they expect the same of me, or will they hold a higher standard?

Understanding that my positionality may change throughout this process, or participant comments may encourage a reflection upon my own positions, I decided that it would be critical to maintain a research diary alongside my data analysis, to track how my relationships with my participants may change or be affected by my positionality throughout the process. Utilising this method of auto-ethnography would also allow me to document my own feelings, again, if I felt that they were pertinent to the process.

3.3.1c Research diaries

Keeping a research diary in qualitative research is essential for a variety of reasons. Mosurska (2021, p. 51) argues that diaries are excellent tools for engaging in a process of self- reflexivity, and can be used to interrogate ‘how background, personal involvement, sympathies, prejudices, fears, and emotional and physical reactions influence research’. Keeping a diary allows the researcher to formulate their thoughts, ideas, questions, and future discussion points through this platform; Engin (2011) posits here that the diary is used as an ‘anchor’ for these factors (p. 297). Browne (2013, p. 12) emphasises the importance of using a research diary for ‘critical reflection’; when considering his own research in Palestine, he claims the research diary is a vital tool for the repository of thoughts when one is “‘in the thick of it’” (p. 2). Within this reflection, it is imperative that researchers do not just account for what happened (be it in interview, or through witnessing events), but should also include their own perspectives and reactions.

Reflexivity through auto-ethnographic diarying can significantly shape a study by influencing both the research process and the interpretation of findings and can be a powerful tool for helping a researcher to navigate and articulate their positionality. As noted in the introduction to this thesis, I position myself both inside and outside the research space, and over time, have questioned both my faith and sexual identity. Whilst I did not want to assume that I would react strongly to the interviews undertaken, I also could not definitively state that I would have no emotional reaction whatsoever. Therefore, I decided that reflecting – through the form of a diary – after each interview would provide the opportunity for me to navigate any particular feelings, allowing space to identify and critically examine my own biases, balance my insider knowledge with scholarly distance, and note any times where my position may have, unintentionally, shaped participant responses.

Throughout each interview, I made rough notes on participant comments that I found intriguing, where I learnt markedly new information, or where I felt an emotional response to a participant's comment. At a later date – within around one week of the original interview – I listened to the interview recordings alongside my rough notes to further reflect, before creating an 'official' diary entry – that is, a comprehensive entry, in the way that a young child may keep a diary at the end of each day. It was critical to me as a researcher that if any overly personal responses came from my reflections that, whilst these should valuably be recognised, they should not overly colour the data and shape my study in a way that is not overly biased. Utilising a research diary provided me with the space to comfortably and freely share my personal thoughts surrounding this study, whilst then allowing a space free of any overt bias to flourish – that is, within the main body of analysis²¹.

3.3.2 The Covid-19 pandemic and online ethics

In March 2020, the UK entered a nationwide lockdown due to the ever-growing threat of Covid-19, and much of everyday life was brought to a standstill. With a 'tiered' system introduced in October 2020, and a second national lockdown implemented the following month (Institute for Government analysis, 2022), this level of uncertainty led me to consider how my research would be affected, particularly the work I aimed to conduct in the field. With the pandemic forcing a majority of teaching and learning to move from in-person to online (Serhan, 2020, p. 335), most researchers needed to adapt and modify their data collection in qualitative research, choosing to utilise methods such as social media analysis, telephone calls, or interviewing through online platforms (see Section 3.2.3a) (Garcia Garcia and Barclay, 2020, p. 5). Whilst these methods already provided a convenient and cost-effective way to avoid face-to-face interviewing (Gray et al., 2020, p. 1292), they became a staple of academic research during the global pandemic.

²¹ Excerpts from my research diary can be found in Appendix D.

I started my research study in September 2020. Whilst at this point many restrictions had been lifted across the UK, the pandemic was still very much present, and - in regard to research and wider academia - most students were still working from home, with limited access to university campuses, libraries, and other educational resources. As I had never experienced anything similar to the pandemic before, and was unaware of the upcoming second national lockdown, after careful consideration of both the pandemic and the geographical spread of my work, I concluded that the most sensible approach would be to complete my fieldwork online, with a plan to conduct interviews via a video-calling service. Alongside cost-effectiveness, interviewing online may be a more comfortable style of interviewing for reasons such as social anxiety, an inability to travel, a wariness of meeting a stranger face-to-face to discuss personal issues, or uncertainty surrounding inviting a stranger to one's local area.

3.3.2a Further ethical considerations during Covid-19

Researching and interviewing online does not dispel any ethical concerns, but in fact brings ethical concerns of their own. Lupton (2022, p. 38) reminds us that it is important to consider the 'affective atmospheres' of conducting social research in a pandemic. Many if not all individuals will have had their normal routines disrupted, are taken unwell, or are feeling worried or uncertain. Some may also be living in environments where they are subjected to harassment, abuse, or surveillance by family members, exacerbated by a limiting of independence (Jatmiko, Syukron, and Mekarsari, 2020; Bracewell, Hargeaves, and Stanley, 2020; Xue *et al.*, 2020). In these contexts, it is important to consider what levels of privacy an individual may want or need during this time. As a researcher, I therefore considered; how could I provide reassurance or comfort for someone who wants to be involved in this study but, for example, may not be 'out' at home due to repercussions that could come with this, such

as violence or being forced out of the family home? Would it be safer not to allow a participant in these circumstances to take part?

Alongside these ethical considerations, it was important to acknowledge that potential participants may have been facing emotional stress and additional pressures. For participants who are deeply connected to their faith and choose to attend a church space regularly, the inability to physically attend church may be a significant challenge. This could be due to the church's limited access to technology, or a lack of congregants able to support online worship (Dowson, 2020; Pillay, 2020; Parish, 2020). Similarly, participants, whether they are openly discussing or able to discuss their sexuality at home (or not, as the case may be), may find it challenging being unable to access support services such as youth groups or university organisations where they can be open about their sexuality (Fish *et al.*, 2020; Gonzales *et al.*, 2020; Drabble and Eliason, 2021). This lack of access to support services could exacerbate their stress levels. The British Psychology Society (2020, p. 1) underscores the importance of recognising these stressors, stating that 'it is especially important to consider the additional stress and pressures that individuals may be experiencing', and that researchers should display a 'sensitivity towards those who have been affected by the pandemic'. Whilst my interviews took place once restrictions were largely lifted, it was vital that I considered these factors for those who continued to shield, or who may be feeling less confident engaging in public life after the tolls of the pandemic.

3.3.3 Participant age, and questions of parental consent

Ethics within research are 'ubiquitous' and permeate 'all aspects of our lives' (Soltis, 1989, p. 123). Conducting any kind of research with human participants will undoubtedly produce ethical dilemmas for researchers, be it 'possible harm to participants, [...] informed consent, and even social

rights and wrongs' (Soltis, 1989, p. 123). It is imperative that researchers keep a constant awareness that ethical issues may rise and should be dealt with swiftly. When planning for this research study, another such issue that was identified as particularly pertinent to consider was the age of my participants; in particular, what age bracket, or brackets, would be suitable to recruit from, and the consent and appropriateness surrounding these ages.

3.3.3a Age of participants

The age ranges considered for this research study changed from 12 to 16-years-old, to 16 to 25-years-old, and finally, 18 to 25-years-old. In order to identify a suitable age bracket, I turned to previous research on bisexuality and Christianity, and wider studies on bisexuality and the LGBT+ community as a whole. In the studies examined, I noted that the lowest age limit in any project was 18 years of age, with the upper limit in one project reaching 76 (see Toft, 2016; Yip and Gross, 2010; Lapinski and McKirnan, 2013; Toft, 2014; Levy and Harr, 2018). The only exception made here was in a study by Dunlop *et al* (2022), where the lower age limit was 16.

Realising that there was a lack of sexuality research that focused on participants below the age of 16, I felt encouraged to centre my research on an age bracket of 12 to 16 years. At this juncture, I would argue that amplifying the voices of a younger generation who might be grappling with bicurious or bisexual feelings, or who may even be navigating same-gender relationships would be imperative to developing sexuality research. I believed this to be especially important as young people who identify as LGBT+, especially those of faith, are often dismissed, with their identity trivialised and their experiences labelled as 'just a phase'. In the wider research world, children and young people are also often dismissed, treated as 'passive respondents' in research, where questions and interviews are drafted, written, and undertaken by adults, often meaning that this research is 'likely to miss key aspects

that matter’ to children and young people (Kleine, Pearson, and Poveda, 2016, p. 6). I therefore wished to provide a platform for these young people to ‘express their views on matters relevant to their own lives’ (Aggleton, Ball, and Mane, 2000, p.216).

However, careful considerations of parental consent and appropriateness led me to reconsider my age group for recruitment²². Due to the sensitivity of my research area, and also considering the responses I hoped to receive to the reading task (which for younger participants, could be slightly traumatic), I decided that the best course of action would be to raise my lower age limit to 18, and my upper age limit to 25, to dispel any potential concerns surrounding parental consent and child protection. When beginning my study, I myself fell centrally within the 18-to- 25 age bracket, another factor which I felt would then benefit the study as I would be able to relate, from a social perspective, to my participants and their lives. I concluded that this age bracket would allow me to gather a rich data pool, which could be examined well alongside the data collected from the *LLF* participants. It should also be considered that, when approaching data analysis, data collected from 18-to-25-year-olds would, ultimately, provide better comparisons and richer links to that of the *LLF* participant group.

²² When considering age and parental consent, the following factors were scrutinised. Firstly, to ensure clarity surrounding the research process, I would have had to explain my study in full to parents. After hearing the aims of the study in full, some parents may have considered the project to be inappropriate and not wanted their child to take part, even if the parent is aware that their child identifies as bisexual and are accepting of this. For others, they may not have been aware that their child identifies as bisexual, therefore taking part in my study would have ‘outed’ the child to their parents. Even for those with accepting families, the child may still have been nervous about divulging information to a stranger. If parents chose to withdraw their children after hearing the nuances of this study, this could have drastically reduced my participant pool. When considering the argument of ‘appropriateness’, I considered the position of a parent, and came to the following conclusion. Whilst this would not be the case for all, I believe that certain parents may have found the wider topic of my research study inappropriate to discuss with children due to a personal lack of confidence in discussing sex and sexuality or allowing their child to access information on these topics. El-Shaib and Wurtele (2009) and Bennett and Harden (2019) argue that sexuality is seen as a ‘taboo’ topic in many families, especially when considering non-heterosexuality; this has been a particularly significant area of discussion in the UK of late (considering, in particular, the Birmingham primary school riots of 2019), and as someone who has previously worked in the secondary education sector, I am aware of the many arguments posed by families.

3.3.4 Research incentives

‘An incentive is defined as that which influences or encourages action; motive; spur; stimulus’ (Rice and Broome, 2004, p. 167). Incentives can be monetary (e.g., cash or gift cards), physical (e.g., gifts), or may include entries into competitions or prize draws. Employing incentives to attract research participants presents both advantages and disadvantages. Firstly, offering incentives can motivate individuals to participate in research who might otherwise be reluctant or too busy to do so, or may have initially been disinterested in the research study (Collins, Bronte-Tinkew, and Burkhauser, 2008). This can lead to a larger and more diverse participant pool, enhancing the generalisability of findings. Secondly, similar to the commitment that researchers dedicate to their studies, participants will also often need to invest considerable time and effort in research endeavours. Incentives serve to acknowledge and compensate for their time, rendering participation more inviting, particularly in studies with demanding tasks or extensive time commitments. Incentivising research participants can be seen as ‘rightly recognis[ing] the contribution individuals make to research outcomes’ (Zutlevics, 2016, p. 138), and understanding that without said incentives, a suitable number of participants may not emerge. Offering incentives can also attract a more diverse range of participants, including individuals who might be harder to recruit otherwise, such as minority groups, low-income individuals, or individuals with specific characteristics relevant to the research. Finally, providing incentives can increase participant engagement and commitment to the study tasks, leading to more accurate and reliable data.

On the other hand, offering incentives might attract participants solely motivated by the reward rather than a genuine interest in the research topic, which could compromise the quality of their responses and introduce bias. Incentives can also create ‘coercive’ (Zutlevics, 2016, p. 138) situations, where participants might feel forced to participate or to provide certain responses to receive the reward.

This challenges the principles of voluntary and informed consent. It should also be considered that providing external rewards can diminish genuine motivation for participating, as participants may focus on the reward rather than the value of the research itself (Zutlevics, 2016, p. 139).

Whilst I believe that incentives can certainly be suitable for studies of both small and large scales, due to their ability to enhance participation and diversify participant pools, it is important to consider potential downsides, especially regarding participant motivation, data quality, ethical concerns, and budget constraints. Balancing these positives and negatives is essential to ensure the integrity and validity of the research outcomes. Ultimately, in the case of my own research study, I do not believe that incentives were required; without any form of incentive, I was able to recruit bisexual Christian participants within a 33-day period²³.

3.3.5 Gender bias in research

In research studies involving human participants, particularly studies that may involve clinical trials or discussions of a personal/sensitive nature, the comfort of the participant should be at the forefront of every researcher's mind. One such factor that the researcher should consider is how their gender plays into this comfort and ease, and whether this could hinder participation. Ultimately, being aware of these differences may help researchers develop better processes for obtaining consent that safeguard the right of autonomy for all participants' (Lobato *et al.*, 2014, p.1), therefore the following aspects should be considered by the researcher.

Firstly, participants may feel more comfortable and willing to participate in a study where the researcher's gender aligns with their own. This could be due to a sense of shared experiences, beliefs,

²³ Incentives were also not provided for my *Living in Love and Faith* participants, due to a use of convenience sampling.

or cultural norms. Second, participants may be more inclined to trust and establish rapport with researchers who share their gender. Trust is crucial in research participation, as participants need to believe that their information will be handled appropriately and that the study is conducted ethically; research should be undertaken with ‘the participant’s best interests in mind’ (Horn *et al.*, 2011, p. 840). Dependent upon the research topic, the gender of the researcher might be perceived as relevant to the study's subject matter. For instance, participants might assume that a female researcher is better suited to understand and address issues related to women's health, or a male researcher is more knowledgeable about topics traditionally associated with masculinity. Some participants may hold implicit biases about gender and expertise; this could lead to assumptions that researchers of a certain gender are more knowledgeable or credible in certain fields or topics. Finally, as noted above, some participants might feel uncomfortable discussing sensitive or personal topics with a researcher of a different gender for cultural, social, or personal reasons (Pinto *et al.*, 2022, p. 41).

There are various ways in which to potentially mitigate these concerns, although of course it should be considered that a ‘one size fits all’ approach will not work for every research study. McDonald, Kidney, and Patka (2013) argue that in order to ‘conduct safe and respectful research, we need to listen to the views of those most intimately affected by facets of research with which they have direct experience’ (p. 216). As an example, potential participants to my study who identify as non-binary or transgender may feel that, as a cisgender woman, I would not have understood the complexities and nuances that may exist for them in navigating their faith, sexuality, and gender identity, and therefore would not have wanted to take part. In such situations, it would be vital to listen to the concerns and experiences of those who identify outside of my own positionality, in order to provide a research environment which is safe, inclusive, and allows the widest remit for discussion. When considering research environments as a whole, I would argue that potential biases surrounding

gender can be mitigated through emphasising the confidentiality of responses (Levy, 2013, p. 205) and maintaining professionalism throughout the research process. In larger research studies, to minimise the influence of the researcher's gender on participant recruitment and engagement, researchers may consider diversifying their research team, and ultimately, as noted in my own reflections, researchers should prioritise both ethical conduct and participant comfort throughout the research process (Budworth, 2023, p. 1).

3.3.6 Summary

This chapter has presented the methodological groundings for my research study, including theoretical frameworks, the social and ethical considerations conducted prior to beginning research, and the processes undertaken to complete my research. This research integrates the triangulation concept to examine the disparity between bisexual Christian lived experience and the way bisexuality is represented in Church of England publications and policies. The three key elements of this triangulation – lived experience, institutional policies, and policy-maker perspectives – are analysed using the theoretical frameworks outlined within this chapter. Each framework contributes uniquely to identifying gaps, inconsistencies, and potential areas for inclusivity within the Church's discourse on bisexuality.

Lived religion plays a crucial role in this triangulation by capturing the personal and communal expressions of faith among bisexual Christians. It moves beyond doctrine to explore how individuals navigate faith in their daily lives. By focusing on lived religion, this study highlights the contrast between how bisexual Christians practice their faith versus how their identities are formally recognised, or ignored, within Church publications and policies. This aspect of the triangulation concept ensures that the voices of bisexual Christians are at the center of the research, providing insight into their challenges, resilience, and spiritual adaptations.

Heteronormativity is deeply embedded within Church of England policies, shaping assumptions about relationships, sexuality, and morality. By applying a heteronormative lens to Church publications and policymaking, this research critically evaluates how bisexuality is positioned within official discourse. This analysis helps identify whether Church policies perpetuate exclusionary narratives or if they evolve to accommodate the lived realities of bisexual Christians. The triangulation method benefits from this framework by clarifying the extent to which institutional policies reinforce binary sexual norms that fail to encompass bisexual identities.

IPA supports the triangulation concept by providing a detailed, idiographic exploration of bisexual Christians' lived experiences. It allows for an in-depth examination of how individuals perceive their place within the Church and how they interpret Church policies that directly impact them. By juxtaposing these personal narratives with official Church documents and the perspectives of policymakers, IPA helps uncover critical gaps between policy intent and practical impact. This methodological approach strengthens the triangulation framework by ensuring that institutional discourse is critically assessed against the lived reality of bisexual Christians.

Queer theory deconstructs normative assumptions within Church policies, whilst bisexual theory offers a necessary critique of bisexual erasure in religious discourse. These frameworks challenge binary thinking within institutional policies and provide tools for assessing how policy makers conceptualise bisexuality. The triangulation method benefits from these perspectives by interrogating whether policy makers engage with bisexuality as a legitimate identity or whether their decisions are influenced by external theological traditions and societal biases. This part of the triangulation process ensures a critical evaluation of whether bisexual Christians are meaningfully

included in Church discourse or are instead framed through heteronormative or monosexual assumptions.

By utilising these frameworks within the triangulation concept, this study aims to expose disparities between the lived experiences of bisexual Christians, Church policies, and policy-maker perspectives. The comparative analysis of these three elements provides a comprehensive understanding of whether Church policies support bisexual individuals or contribute to their marginalisation. Furthermore, this research seeks to explore pathways for greater inclusivity, ensuring that bisexual voices are no longer overlooked in Church discourse. By identifying these gaps, the study fosters a deeper discussion on how institutional policies can better reflect and support the diverse experiences of bisexual Christians within the Church of England.

Chapter 4

‘Insulting’, ‘troubling’, ‘unhelpful’: examining bisexual language in Church of England policy and publications, and how the Church can move forward

BC001: ‘It is simply laced with a bunch of untrue stereotypes that were generated by scared men who could not understand anything beyond their own heterosexuality, and it is unhelpful and insulting, quite frankly’ – *Katie* (Lines 406 – 408, p. 13)

‘You’d expect some sort of engagement with people who have actually experienced this, but no. It’s sort of comparable to how you could write in the past, you could write about women without ever talking to a woman [...] There’s no evidence in the document that they did [talk to bisexual people] is there?’ – *LLF002* (Lines 340 – 342, 365, pp. 11 - 12)

‘Felt a lot of what could probably be described as disgust, but definitely exasperation [...] Why on earth would you feel happy or comfortable or included knowing your church stereotypes you in this way? [...] Why would anyone want that?’ (Research diary entry, 16/02/2022)

As has already been, and will continue to be, shown throughout this thesis, it is no secret that bisexuality and the CoFE have a fraught relationship, one which, arguably, can trace its beginnings back to the release of *Issues*, most notably Section 5.8. From the release of *Issues* in 1991, right through to the present day, the Church has exhibited a lack of understanding, in terms of its ‘top down’ identity and through publications, about the bisexual identity, and the unique issues that bisexual Christians face. This is only too clear when we firstly look backwards to the language used in *Issues*, look currently to the lack of present, active language (about bisexuality), and presently to *LLF*, the CoFE’s most recent publication on human sexuality. Even if we attempt to dismiss the misunderstandings in *Issues* on the grounds of social and cultural contexts, *LLF* still fails to show much development in the Church’s understanding and support of bisexuality, alongside developments in language used to explore this identity, in a society that is becoming increasingly more open and understanding of different sexual identities. To begin this chapter, it is important for us to briefly examine how the language in *Issues* created a significant link between the two groups of participants in this study, ultimately allowing this

theme to come to fruition.

4.1 Research aims

This chapter aims to address **Research Statements 1, 2 and 3**. Firstly, the data in this chapter shows that not all bisexual Christians have engaged with, or previously developed an understanding of, Christian publications and policies. However, responses to language and attitudes, whether they are previously formed or brand new, still show an emotional response that should be noted by church communities. Within this chapter, the bisexual Christian participants are exposed to language in *Issues*, and in turn, their responses emphasise the anger, betrayal, and confusion that they feel due to the stereotypical and negative ways in which they have been viewed by their Church, and in turn, how heteronormative societal and religious expectations have exacerbated these emotions. These responses would not have been possible without the formulation of particular questions, alongside the reading task: these actions have, therefore, allowed the platform of response to be widened, and for bisexual Christians surrounding the particularly unique issue of language and lived experience to be shared.

This chapter also provides detailed analysis into data that supports Research Aim 2. The participants interviewed who were involved in the *LLF* process come from a variety of academic and theological backgrounds, but ultimately, all share a deep knowledge of the language presented within Church policies and publications, the contextual basis upon which this language is formed, and the impacts it may have on minority communities. The discussions of language with this group came from a completely different angle to that of the bisexual participants and yet, as the data will show, there is a similar undertone to responses: that this language is outdated, hurtful, and a process of change must be encouraged. I argue that the voices of the *LLF* participants and their opinions on how the Church can

grow and develop are particularly strong within this chapter and strengthen the call for support and change for the bisexual community.

Finally, considering the interplay of these two groups of responses surrounding the nature of language and its impact on communities has inspired the guidance document presented at the end of this thesis. A commonality of thought exists between both interview groups, and both believe that change needs to be actioned within the Church. Considering the wealth of responses together will in turn encourage the dissemination of guidance on how to instigate change-making and facilitate connections and will - it is hoped - provide a better relationship between lived religion and publication processes.

4.2 A common interest

This thesis seeks to develop a new insight into the lived experiences of bisexual Christians in the CofE and, in turn, examine the disparities that exist between these lived experiences, and what those involved in policy and publications within the Church may think of, or about, the bisexual community. This connection between interview groups was encouraged by bringing *Issues* into conversations, whether through a set reading task (with the bisexual participants) or through an academic and/or spiritual discussion, dependent on background (with the *LLF* participants). I would argue that, through both sets of discussions, a contempt for *Issues* was revealed, which brought the mindsets of the two participant groups closer together, and ultimately provides us with an opportunity – through mutual agreement – in which the bisexual community can make themselves both heard, visible, and understood, within the CofE.

The participant quotations that open this chapter are very apt to begin this discussion, as both emphasise the lack of understanding that the Church is displaying when it comes to bisexuality. Katie's

comment shows a personal, emotional response to a text that, as she states, is unhelpful towards and insults her community, and is ultimately written by individuals who, quite simply, had no personal experience within the area they were writing about²⁴. The following quotation, from LLF002, whilst they themselves were not as personally involved with the language presented in *Issues* (although they had engaged with the text on both academic and spiritual levels), there is certainly a shared sense of injustice, and an understanding that the language used is inappropriate and disengaged from the bisexual community. Throughout this chapter, interview comments from the *LLF* participants will be examined frequently; I do believe that due to their academic and religious backgrounds, and their joint involvement with *LLF*, that a discussion of language within Church publications is an area within which they could be the most vocal. The aforementioned, alongside the fact that none of the *LLF* participants identified as bisexual, means that these interviews took on a more formal tone, and were less personal and emotionally charged than the bisexual interviews. However, even with these factors in mind, I argue that the *LLF* participants' responses throughout this chapter will show a certain sense of perspective; that even if one is not emotionally involved with the language that a text presents, it can still be understood to be dated and in serious need of change.

4.3 Further considerations with this data

During the data analysis process, which led to the subsequent creation of this theme focusing on language, I considered to what extent the data may have been different if I had also undertaken a reading task with the *LLF* participants, and if this would have in any way contributed to a richer data pool. Ultimately, I decided that this would not have made a significant enough difference to the data I

²⁴ This is, of course, assumed; we have no grounds on which to prove, or even speculate, that any authors involved with *Issues* were bisexual. Even if any were, I would argue that these identities would have been kept a secret due to societal influences at the time, be it a lack of understanding of non-heterosexual identities, the recent 'scaremongering' AIDs campaign in the United Kingdom, etc.

had collected. I would argue that due to the *LLF* participants having already been ‘exposed’ to *Issues* through their academic and theological backgrounds, I would not receive the raw responses that occurred with the bisexual participants. *Issues* was used as a bridging document to see where potential similarities or differences in opinion may exist between the two groups, but overall, the general aims of the interviews were different. *Issues* would easily be discussed with the *LLF* participants, but in different ways, be it through social, theological, or historical lenses.

This chapter will be split into two main sections. After a process of familiarisation and immersion within the data, followed by exploratory noting, thematic identification was undertaken in the IPA process, and subsequent connections and subthemes began to take shape. Within the interviews, discussions of *Issues* – and particular language points within Section 5.8 – were frequent, therefore allowing *Issues* to exist as a key subtheme within wider understandings of language. In turn, other texts, such as *LLF*, also warranted discussion and interest, allowing the second major subtheme to occur. With this in mind, firstly, *Issues* will be examined through the eyes of the participants, focusing on the language that they believe is powerful, important, and which highlights a need for change. Particular phrases will help to shape each subheading. Secondly, whilst *Issues* is our main document of focus, we cannot ignore other Church documents that have come to shape and share CofE understandings of bisexuality. We will consider, therefore, how other documents have contributed to these understandings, and what gaps they may have filled, alongside what gaps have been left. Our examinations throughout this thematic analysis are underpinned by the three research statements for this thesis, and are expanded here through the following sub questions:

RQ1: What are the bisexual stereotypes that exist within the CofE, and how can these be combatted?

RQ2: How can language play a part in encouraging, and battling, these stereotypes?

RQ3: When we consider the relevance or context of this language, how can we then forge a path to move forward to create more inclusive Christian language for bisexuals?

RQ4: How can the Church engage with bisexual Christians in order to change what it has to say?

4.4 The impression of *Issues*

It is important to recognise throughout the discussion of texts in this chapter, noting *Issues* in particular, that the comments I am sharing from participants were collated in 2021 and 2022. Since then, *Issues* has been removed from the CofE ordination process, and Bishops have released further comments regarding *LLF*, specifically on how they will aim to continue developing their understanding around different gender and sexual identities (Church of England, 2023c, p. 16). With this in mind, some comments may seem outdated within the current Church timeline. Therefore, if required, a footnote will accompany particular comments.

Issues became a central point of research within both the focus groups, and semi-structured interviews conducted with both groups of participants. It was of no surprise that, during the focus groups and interviews, particular pieces of language were commented on; as the rest of this chapter will show, some of, if not most of, the language in Section 5.8 of *Issues* is nothing short of horrific, eliciting a strong emotional response. However, to only focus on these particular phrases would be to deny the wider responses that the participants had to this text, which will now be expanded upon.

As noted within the literature review, there is a significant lack of responses to *Issues*. This absence of detailed critical analysis leads us to ask, why is there such a lack of response to a text that is both abhorrent and obsolete? Have theologians, bisexual theologians in particular, found the text too distressing to engage with? Is *Issues* now seen as outdated, and therefore not deemed worthy of

discussion? Thinking contextually, was there a fear of repercussion if one chose to write a response piece in the 1990s? Was the text, at the time, not seen as worthy of analytical discussion? Was bisexuality still so misunderstood that Section 5.8 was not seen as a paragraph that needed further analysis? This ‘fundamental misunderstanding of bisexuals’ (Lingwood, 2010, p. 31) from the Church emphasises why the voices of the participants in this study are so pertinent in showing that Section 5.8 of *Issues* still has a deep impact on the bisexual community, and even for those not emotionally involved, it is time for this text to be removed from Church life, and perhaps more importantly, apologised for. LLF003 summarises Section 5.8 and the wider document well, stating that *Issues* is a ‘dreadful document’, that is ‘really painful to read’ (Line 13, p. 1), and that the *Living in Love and Faith* project, ‘for all its failings’, truly emphasises how ‘dated and problematic’ the language is in *Issues* (lines 60 - 61, p. 2).

As a reminder, the particular themes documented within this chapter came about through an analytical process of immersion, close reading, and thematic identification through exploratory noting. This process highlighted the below subthemes and thus allowed them to emerge, and they will now be explored in more detail.

4.5 The ‘dehumanisation’ of bisexuality

BC002: ‘By using that language, I think it seems quite dehumanising’ – *Mia* (Line 342, p. 12)
(*Mia here is referring to the use of ‘heterophile’ in Section 5.8*)

When not pinpointing the particularly ‘famous’ quotations from Section 5.8, both the bisexual and LLF participants noted how the passage, overall, dehumanises bisexuality. Participants from both groups commented on the uses of ‘homophile’ and ‘heterophile’ within the text. To briefly note, whilst the word ‘heterophile’ is specifically referred to in Section 5.8, ‘homophile’ is not. Homophile is, however, mentioned elsewhere within Chapter 5 of *Issues* (which in itself is titled ‘The Homophile in

the Life and Fellowship of the Church’). The entirety of Chapter 5 was not shared with the participants, but some participants from both groups did have an extended knowledge of the text, with some choosing to comment on elements outside of Section 5.8 if they saw fit.

Eve was one such participant who commented on the use of ‘heterophile’:

BC003: ‘I feel like it’s also got a very kind of, scientific language, like heterophile’ (lines 167 – 168, p. 6)

Eve is correct when noting that the term has a scientific undertone; indeed, the term ‘heterophile’ is often found in studies of antibodies and antigens, as opposed to theological discussions of sexuality. To place this language in context, Section 5.8 states that:

‘The Church’s guidance to bisexual Christians is that if they are capable of heterophile relationships and of satisfaction within them...’ (House of Bishops, 1991, Page 42, lines 6 – 7)

I would argue that this clinical language was, at the time, a way in which the CofE attempted to encourage bisexuals to ‘choose a side’, in this case, the side of satisfaction in opposite-gender love. But could this choice of language be more than just a systematic and almost medical reduction of sexuality? Was the Church instead trying to look at sexuality in a way that did not just focus on sexual acts and relationships? **LLF001** believed that this may have been the case:

‘The reason for that choice of language was that it was well intended, *[and]* what it intended to do was to... say same-sex relationships **shouldn’t be thought of as being about sex** in a way that heterosexual relationships are not. So in other words wanting to get away from the idea that actually it’s all about who has sex with who, and wanting to say [...] who someone is in love with, and who someone... wants to forge a long term bondwith [...] I think that a lot of that was behind the choice of the terminology of homophile rather than homosexual, wanting to emphasise love and relationship rather than sexual activity’ (lines 42 - 51, p. 2)

It should be understood that this comment is one which is both intelligent and learned. Would an individual who is non-academically trained consider, or understand, this interpretation? Whilst I believe that no, that would not be the case, LLF001 still stresses a very important argument, and leads us to question the linguistic anomalies that can exist, and how they may be interpreted in different fields of life. LLF001 also refers to the term ‘homophile’, one which is seen in Chapter 5 of *Issues* and is a significantly more present within Christian theological discussions. The term ‘homophile’ was coined by German physician Karl-Günther Heimsoth in his 1924 thesis ‘Hetero- und Homophile’, (lgbthistory.org.uk, 2014) and gained an increased popularity in the 1950s and ‘60s. The aim of using this term – as opposed to ‘homosexual’ – allowed individuals to move away from the rather unforgiving discussions that existed around homosexuality. By using ‘homophile’, with ‘-phile’ being taken from the Greek root for ‘love’, homophiles could then emphasise the romantic and loving aspects of their relationships, instead of the sexual (Kjær, 2003; Jordan, 2011). The term was still popular with Anglican clergy in the 1990s, as shown from its use throughout *Issues*.

Perhaps here we could question, did Anglican clergy choose to use both ‘heterophile’ and ‘homophile’ within their literature to show that *all* relationships, including opposite gender relationships, should instead focus on love, and not sex? Was this potentially a progressive way of showing that opposite gender and same gender relationships could be respected on the same level? Or, as LLF003 posits, is using this language just a ‘weird habit of using language that no one else uses’ (line 17, p. 1) that the Church is yet to move away from? Whilst either could be the case, bisexuality is then starkly left out of this loving and caring way of viewing relationships. As Katie states:

BC001: ‘It’s interesting that they’re able to say bi-SEX-ual, but hetero-PHILE seems a lot more graceful’ (Lines 426 – 427, p. 14) (*the capitals used here within ‘bi-SEX-ual’ and ‘hetero-*

PHILE’ represent the stress that Katie put upon this word within her interview; she was keen to amplify the differentiation between ‘sex’ and ‘phile’, and the implications this could have for the bisexual identity)

We could argue here that, to continue with our Greek deconstruction, if ‘bi’ means two, and ‘phil’ means love, why not ‘biphile’ instead of ‘bisexuality’? Why not ‘the love of two’? Is it because, at this time, the Church was unable to understand that bisexuality could also be about love, instead of purely about wanting sexual relationships, and multiples of them at the same time, as was echoed in text and arguably still is today? Why does bisexuality not receive the same linguistic change that ‘homophile’ and ‘heterophile’ do? Did the Church actively choose to engage with the term ‘homophile’ because, whilst it was acceptable for same-sex love to exist, same-sex sexual actions could not? As [LLF002](#) argues, ‘that use of the term ‘homophilia’, which they presumably had because they wanted to talk about people who are attracted to the same sex, but they couldn’t cope with the idea of them actually doing anything with their bodies [...] It’s quite extraordinary because [...] no one uses that word’ (lines 21 – 25, p. 1). This linguistic distinction highlights the broader influence of heteronormativity within both religious and societal discourse. Heteronormativity, as reinforced by the Church, assumes that attraction and relationships must align with a rigid heterosexual framework, in which love and sexuality are neatly compartmentalised. By preferring the term ‘homophile’ over ‘homosexual,’ the Church allows same-gender attraction but condemns its physical expression, preserving traditional moral structures. Bisexuality challenges this binary, disrupting the Church’s need for clear boundaries between acceptable and unacceptable love. The lack of a distinct term for bisexuality, unlike ‘homophile’ or ‘heterophile,’ reinforces the misconception that bisexuality is linked to promiscuity rather than stable relationships. This erasure supports the heteronormative ideal of monogamous, gender-complementary unions as the only legitimate form of love.

Whilst language such as ‘homophile’ and ‘heterophile’ is not used in the CofE anymore, the fact that this language has never again been commented on by the Church shows a lack of development with how we construct language about bisexuality. As Mia states in the introduction to this discussion, this scientific, cold language is almost dehumanising, showing how in turn bisexuality is seen as something inhumane, to be discussed in the way that one may discuss an unknown species in a scientific laboratory. In fact, both Eve and LLF002 discuss this exact point:

BC003: ‘The terming of, you know, ‘the bisexual’, it’s like there’s some kind of, dehumanised kind of animal, like someone’s talking about a species’ (lines 162 - 163, p. 6)

LLF002: ‘Clinical in a bad way, yeah, like bisexuals are just sort of a weird species that we might just pin down on the board, like a butterfly or something and go ‘ooh’’ (lines 372 – 373, p. 12)

As Mia argues, *Issues* is one of the only Christian texts in which she has seen these words, words which are ‘just objectively horrible’ (**BC002**, line 332, p. 11). As further discussions of pinpointed quotations from the text will show, most of, if not all of, the language in Section 5.8 is painful and indeed, ‘objectively horrible’. When we consider lived religion, this concept highlights the disconnect between institutional doctrine and the everyday faith experiences of bisexual Christians, exposing how heteronormativity shapes the Church’s language and pastoral approach. Whilst official statements may attempt to define sexuality through rigid theological frameworks, the reality of lived religion reveals the deep emotional and spiritual harm caused by such language. For bisexual individuals, faith is not just an abstract doctrine but a lived, embodied practice, one that is often shaped by exclusion and alienation when the Church, constrained by heteronormative assumptions, refuses to acknowledge their identities with dignity. If the language in texts like *Issues* is ‘objectively horrible,’ as Mia states, then it is not simply a theological concern but a pastoral one. At what point does the lived reality of bisexual

Christians demand that doctrine be re-examined in light of the harm heteronormativity continues to perpetuate?

4.6 The apparent ambiguity of bisexuality

‘We recognise that there are those whose sexual orientation is ambiguous, and who can find themselves attracted to partners of either sex’ (*Issues in Human Sexuality*, Section 5.8, page 42, lines 1 – 2)

In the review of literature that constitutes part of this thesis, the term ‘ambiguity’ is seen to have multiple definitions. The definition which I believe resonated the most in the context of bisexual Christianity was that ambiguity represents something that is unclear, or undecided. In both the bisexual Christian, and wider bisexual communities, bisexuals are often seen as ‘confused, undecided, in transition between heterosexual and lesbian, ‘really lesbian’ but holding onto their heterosexual privilege, cowardly, avoiding the stigma of being a lesbian, wanting the best of both worlds, promiscuous, unable to commit and seeking the attention of heterosexual men’ (Hayfield, Clarke and Halliwell, 2014, p. 356). These misconceptions stem from a lack of understanding, rooted in a heteronormative framework that assumes sexual orientation must be fixed and binary. The Church of England is no different in its treatment of bisexuality, as it similarly relies on these flawed assumptions of ambiguity. Lingwood (2010, p. 34) argues that the Church’s language in *Issues* shows that ‘to be bisexual is to be confused, ambiguous, undecided about what identity one is going to drop into’. From a lived religion perspective, such framing disregards the real experiences of bisexual Christians, whose faith is shaped not by confusion but by the struggle to reconcile their identity within a Church that fails to recognise them. Heteronormativity not only distorts theological discourse but also influences pastoral care, leaving bisexual Christians feeling invisible and unwelcome in their own faith communities.

In her interview, Eve argued that this use of language emphasised a misunderstanding on behalf of the CofE:

BC003: ‘Talking about their sexual orientation about ambiguous, I mean it’s not ambiguous, it’s a definitive sexual identity, it’s just... yeah, so the idea of ambiguity is kind of troubling and shows a lack of understanding of what the identity actually means’ (lines 167 – 170, p. 6)

Eve believes that the Church’s use of ‘ambiguous’ stresses the inability to see bisexuality as its own valid sexual identity. Within wider society, but particularly within a Christian context, the very nature of bisexuality challenges the binary structure that so many Christian communities adhere to. The bisexual identity is often seen as ‘an ambiguous social category within the dominant dualistic sex/gender structure’ (Ault, 1996, p. 449). The prevalence of both hetero- and monosexisms mean that bisexuality is not welcomed within the binary, therefore showing bisexuals to apparently be confused, undecided, or unclear about their identity.

4.6.1 A lack of clarity?

Ruth finds this lack of clarity within the CofE almost laughable, as to her there is an obvious clarity to the bisexual identity:

BC006: ‘The word ‘ambiguous’ makes me laugh because it’s not ambiguous, it’s very clear [...] I actually can’t believe this is still used. Actually shocking’ (lines 331 – 335, p. 12)

Lauren also believes that bisexuality can be and should be clearly understood, and that the Church is reinforcing negative stereotypes through its language:

BC004: ‘The bit where it says that their sexual orientation is ambiguous. No it’s not, it’s very clear. I think that plays into the stereotype of bisexual people just experimenting, or still questioning, rather than having like, a full identity in itself’ (lines 267 – 269, p. 10)

Both Ruth and Lauren view bisexuality as a clearly defined sexual identity. This clarity is intuitive to them as bisexual individuals, as they understand their own experiences. However, for those outside the bisexual community, including members of the Church of England, significant barriers may prevent this same level of understanding. A key factor is the ingrained heteronormative framework within the Church, which relies on binary classifications of sexuality. This rigid perspective makes it difficult for bisexuality to be seen as anything other than ambiguous or unstable. As Eve suggests (see earlier comment, transcript lines 167–170, p. 6), the Church’s binary mindset may prevent it from ever fully recognising bisexuality as a legitimate identity rather than a phase or state of ‘ambiguity’. LLF003 expresses deep frustration at this lack of understanding, stating, ‘it’s as if people just don’t get what orientation means [...] it involves a misunderstanding so basic that it just infuriates me’ (lines 95–96, p. 4). From a lived religion perspective, this disconnect is not just a theoretical issue but a real, lived struggle for bisexual Christians, whose faith communities often fail to acknowledge their identities in meaningful ways. The Church’s inability to move beyond heteronormative assumptions often leaves bisexual individuals feeling unseen and misunderstood. In light of the 2023 statement from the Bishops promising to develop a better understanding of bisexuality, it is crucial to ask: where should this journey of education begin? To truly support bisexual Christians, the Church must first confront the heteronormative structures that have long shaped its teachings and embrace the lived realities of those whose experiences fall outside its traditional binaries.

4.6.1a A definition dilemma?

Could it also not be argued that the flexibility surrounding bisexuality's definition may be the reason why the Church refers to bisexuality in this way? We must of course remember that *Issues* was written at a time when understandings of non-monosexual identities, especially in a Christian context, were very limited. Halperin's (2009, p. 453) 'Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Bisexual' provides readers with exactly that: thirteen ways in which bisexuality could be defined. Whilst understandings of non-monosexuality have grown since Halperin's list, with some definitions perhaps now more appropriately labelled as pansexual or omnisexual (although some bisexuals may continue to identify with the suggestions that fall outside of the typically assumed 'attraction to two genders', and that is completely valid), Halperin's point of clarity still stands. He argues that confusion surrounding bisexuality may be due to the multiple ways that bisexuality can be defined, and that 'one solution to this confusion would be to force some definitional clarity'. But, as Ruth and Lauren argue, is bisexuality not clear, or at least clear enough to be, as Eve argues, its own definitive sexual identity? If the CofE still believes bisexuality to be ambiguous, which we can argue it does as this language has never been rescinded, then how can the Church develop its understandings of the bisexuality identity? How can it gain this clarity, so that bisexuality is no longer seen as ambiguous?

4.6.1b The ambiguity of misconceptions

Finally, I would like to return to the second part of Lauren's previous statement (transcript lines 267 – 269, p. 10). Lauren believes that the Church labels bisexuals as ambiguous because bisexuality is seen as a transitional and not fully formed identity:

BC004: I think that plays into the stereotype of bisexual people just experimenting, or still questioning, rather than having like, a full identity in itself' (lines 268 – 269, p. 10)

Bisexual individuals often face misconceptions and stereotypes that frame their identity as unclear or undecided, reducing bisexuality to a phase of questioning or experimentation (as Lauren states above). These assumptions position bisexuality as a transitional space rather than a stable identity, reinforcing the heteronormative belief that individuals must ultimately ‘choose’ between heterosexuality and homosexuality. As Hayfield, Clarke, and Halliwell (2014, p. 362) note, bisexuals are often perceived as having not yet realised their ‘true’ identity or ‘made up their minds’ and, until they do, they are frequently dismissed as ‘emotionally immature, psychologically disturbed, or confused’. This erasure is deeply rooted in society’s binary understanding of sexuality, which invalidates bisexuality by legitimising only heterosexual and homosexual identities. Furthermore, when bisexual Christians are seen as ‘undecided,’ their faith communities often fail to take their identities seriously, leading to exclusion, invisibility, and a lack of meaningful support. The expectation that bisexual individuals will eventually identify as ‘one or the other’ reflects a broader tendency within the Church to uphold rigid, binary frameworks rather than engage with the complex realities of lived experience. To fully affirm bisexual Christians, the Church must move beyond heteronormative models of sexuality and listen to the voices of those whose faith and identity challenge its traditional assumptions.

4.6.2 Section summary

Bisexuality, according to Macalister (2003, p. 23), is simply ‘too ambiguous for people to accept’. Within the CofE, despite Bishops expressing a willingness to learn more about bisexual identity, the absence of an apology or even acknowledgement of the continued use of terms like ‘ambiguous’ suggests that the Church still views bisexuality through this lens. This language, shaped by a deeply heteronormative framework, reinforces the idea that bisexuality is inherently confused or indecisive, positioning it as something unstable and therefore less valid than heterosexuality or

homosexuality. By framing ambiguity as a problem, the Church upholds binary understandings of sexuality that leave little room for identities that do not fit neatly into its established categories. From a lived religion perspective, this rhetoric has real consequences for bisexual Christians, whose experiences of faith and identity are often dismissed or misunderstood. When the Church continues to characterise bisexuality as uncertain or in flux, it risks alienating those whose faith is deeply intertwined with their bisexual identity. However, as LLF004 asks, ‘what’s wrong with being ambiguous?’ (line 225, p. 7). Perhaps ambiguity does not have to be a negative concept but rather one that challenges rigid binaries and opens space for a more inclusive, nuanced understanding of identity within the Church. If the Church is truly committed to learning, it must move beyond its heteronormative assumptions and engage with the lived realities of bisexual Christians in a way that affirms, rather than erases, their experiences.

4.7 ‘Inevitably involves being unfaithful’

‘Nevertheless, it is clear that bisexual activity must always be wrong for this reason, if for noother, that it inevitably involves being unfaithful’ (*Issues*, lines 3 – 5, p. 42)

‘It’s the worst of the worst of it all, bisexuals must, by definition, be unfaithful. Had they actually talked to anybody? Did they know people who were living as bisexual[s] [people]? Didthey have any idea at all? Probably not’ – LLF002 (Lines 29 – 31, p. 2)

When discussing *Issues* with both groups of participants, one piece of language that caused a particularly emotional, angered response was the Church’s choice of ‘unfaithful’ when describing bisexual activity. As LLF002 states above, for all the horrors that Section 5.8 presents, unfairly describing bisexuals as unfaithful is the ‘worst of the worst of it all’. This tarnishing of an entire community leads us to question, had any bisexuals been spoken to? What factors or grounds are the Church basing these assumptions upon? What lived experience was considered here? What has

encouraged unfaithfulness and promiscuity to become the stereotype for bisexuals?²⁵

4.7.1 Misunderstanding bisexuality as equalling promiscuity

Despite the words ‘promiscuous’ or ‘promiscuity’ not being used themselves in Section 5.8 of *Issues*, the *LLF* participants chose to engage with this language when referring to the Church’s brandishing of bisexuals as unfaithful. Despite this group of participants being less personally involved with what the Church has to say about bisexuality, there was still a shared understanding that this choice of language is a misunderstanding on behalf of the Church and is hurtful to the bisexual Christian community. *LLF001* argued that whilst some bisexuals may engage in open relationships, this cannot be attributed purely to their bisexuality, and that the use of unfaithful, promiscuous language is unfair:

‘This language of promiscuity is, it’s horrible language anyway [...] the assumption that bisexuality equals promiscuity [...] kind of stems from a misunderstanding of what bisexuality as an orientation is. Now undoubtedly there are some bisexual people who are in open and polyamorous relationships, but that’s not because they’re bisexual’ (lines 201 – 208, p. 7)

Bisexuality and polyamory are often discussed together, with stereotypes about both identities frequently overlapping. Bisexual individuals are sometimes misunderstood as needing relationships with multiple people of different genders simultaneously to be considered ‘truly bisexual,’ as Maliepaard and Baumgartner (2021, p. 7) argue. This assumption places an unfair, enforced expectation of polyamory on the bisexual community, questioning just ‘how bisexual’ someone really is. For bisexual individuals in monogamous relationships, or those who engage primarily with one gender, this

²⁵ The words ‘promiscuity’ or ‘promiscuous’ are themselves not mentioned in *Issues*. However, *Some Issues in Human Sexuality* (2003) refers to these terms. In the analytical discussions of bisexuality on pages 212 – 220, Thatcher queries ‘what kind of fidelity might be appropriate for bisexual people, given their specific sexual desires or needs’ (p. 216). In the eighth chapter, where voices from the debates on homosexuals, bisexuals, and transsexuals in the life of the Church are shared, it is then stated that ‘if bisexual sexual activity involves simultaneous sexual relations with people of both sexes then, from the standpoint of traditional Christian ethics, this would either imply promiscuity or infidelity or both. If there are multiple partners of both sexes, then this must mean promiscuity’ (p. 283). As previously stated, only Section 5.8 was shared with the bisexual Christian participants. However, this does not mean that they, alongside the *LLF* participants, had not done previous reading in this area (which may have included *Some Issues*), which was, of course, welcome in discussion.

stereotype leads to an unwarranted questioning of their identity. Whilst it is true that bisexuality and polyamory can coexist – polyamory is often seen as more aligned with the bisexual movement compared to lesbian and gay organisations (Maliepaard, 2021, p. 44) – and can offer ‘erotic autonomy’ (Klesse, 2021, p. 69) for many bisexuals, it is crucial to note that bisexuality should not be conflated with polyamory or non-monogamy by default (Baumgartner, 2021, p. 118). Unfortunately, even among those bisexuals who consensually and ethically engage in polyamorous relationships, they are often stigmatised with allegations of promiscuity. From a heteronormative lens, these stereotypes reflect the broader societal and religious tendency to frame sexuality in binary terms. In the case of the CoFE, which traditionally upholds monogamous, heterosexual relationships as the norm, bisexuality (especially when linked to polyamory) becomes a challenge to its established moral order. This disconnect is not just theoretical but has real implications for the lived experiences of bisexual Christians. For many, navigating both their sexuality and faith involves reconciling their identities within a Church that struggles to understand or validate them. Bisexual Christians, whether in monogamous or polyamorous relationships, often face rejection or invalidation from both their religious communities and wider society due to the persistence of these stereotypes. This points to the need for a more inclusive and nuanced understanding of sexuality, one that moves beyond heteronormative assumptions and recognises the diverse ways in which bisexuality can be expressed and lived out.

In the Church, bisexuals are seen to lack ‘moral integrity’ (Shepherd, 2012, p. 56) and in turn, are accused of promiscuity in order to demonise the community. The so-called ‘shadow of polyamory’ is, according to Shepherd (2021, p. 56), associated with bisexuality in order to ‘suppress the bisexual voice’. But does the Church have any durable ground on which these claims can be made? [LLF005](#)

believes not²⁶. The participant stated that although there has been a minor history of suggesting promiscuity in the Church, it is a mistake to categorise any group of people as promiscuous. This minor suggestion of promiscuity can be found in Vasey's (1995, p. 4) *Strangers and Friends*, where he states that Christian believers 'are likely to be offended [...] by evidence of a defiant, even extravagant, promiscuity on the part of some gay people'. Perhaps this would explain why the authors of Section 5.8 see almost offended by the existence of bisexuality. LLF005 went on to state that it is not acceptable to categorise people like this. It is not helpful, it is a generalisation, and there are many examples in the Church of faithful and committed relationships among bisexual people; therefore, the question must be asked, where does this idea actually come from? LLF005 ended this discussion by stating that it is 'long overdue' that we recognise the faithfulness and commitment of bisexual people, instead of creating a sweeping stereotype for an entire community.

LLF004 believed it to be 'utterly shocking to hear people described in that way, as promiscuous - it's ill-informed, and you know, on that basis alone, it should not be a document that the Church is using' (lines 152 – 154, p. 5). As noted, despite promiscuity not being a term that is actually referenced within Section 5.8, it is obvious from those who have been more widely involved in the creation and understanding of Church publications and policy that this broader language should not be ignored, as it still encourages a disagreeable misunderstanding of bisexuality within the CofE.

4.7.2 The stereotype of unfaithfulness

BC008: 'I think I'm impressed by its [*Issues*] ability to get so many stereotypes into one short paragraph, like the bit about always being unfaithful...' – *Danielle* (Lines 305 – 306, p. 11)

²⁶ LLF005 did not allow their interview to be recorded. Therefore, notes were made throughout the interview to collate key points, but no official transcript was produced. Therefore, this participant cannot be directly quoted.

Danielle believes Section 5.8 of *Issues* to be full of bisexual stereotypes, with the comment on unfaithfulness being no exception. Bisexuals are ‘often labelled with pathological stereotypes’, with ‘one of the most common and highly charged stereotypes’ being that ‘bisexual people are “inherently” unfaithful’ (Hoang, Holloway, and Mendoza, 2011, p. 23). Many bisexuals, despite being monogamous and committed to their partners, will often have to convince others that ‘there is a difference between being bisexual and being unfaithful, promiscuous, or disloyal’ (Ault, 1994, p. 109). These accusations are not limited to one community; both the heterosexual, and lesbian and gay communities, inflict ‘misunderstanding and prejudice’ upon the bisexual community (Spalding and Peplau, 1997, p. 611). In her short essay ‘Girlfriend wanted: bisexuals need not apply’, whilst Orson (2017, p. 105) does not explicitly reference infidelity, she does note that some lesbians believe that bisexuals are ‘just fence-sitters who want to enjoy both worlds but commit fully to neither’, harking back to the idea that all bisexuals want to do is experiment and ‘sleep around’, due to their ability to be attracted to multiple gender identities. Quite simply put, ‘bisexual behaviour implies non-monogamy, which is a threat to marriage, religion and the state’ (George, 1993, p. 22).

The stereotype of bisexuality as inherently ‘unfaithful’ is deeply damaging to bisexual Christians, whose experiences of faith and relationships often contradict these harmful assumptions. The Church, with its strong emphasis on monogamous, heterosexual marriage, is rooted in a heteronormative framework that ostracises those whose identities and relationships do not align with these ideals. For bisexual Christians, navigating their faith means reconciling the tension between their lived reality – where commitment and loyalty can coexist with bisexuality – and a Church that may still view their relationships through a lens of suspicion or moral judgment.

4.7.2a A lack of bisexual input and experience

This quotation invoked frustration in both sets of participants, a frustration which focused on the misconception that bisexuals, due to being attracted to more than one gender identity, will automatically choose to be unfaithful to their partners in order to placate an assumed desire to ‘be’ with many genders at once, romantically, or sexually. Jessica is one such participant who was particularly frustrated by this idea, and believes it emphasises the lack of bisexual input that *Issues* must have had:

BC005: ‘It’s just insane!... Like okay, firstly, it’s that “inevitably involves being unfaithful”. That is my first, like... where have they got that from? It’s like they’ve never met a bisexual or ever talked to a bisexual person, like... it just seems to be a complete misunderstanding of what bisexuality is’ (lines 274 – 277, p. 8)

To focus on the potential lack of bisexual input, this point was also raised by LLF004, who argues for the inadequacy of the documents the CofE has produced, as they fail to involve those who they then choose to speak about:

‘Look, these documents can only be inadequate, of course they can, because we don’t know who the bisexuals were behind *Issues*, if any, [comment redacted to comply with Chatham House rules] we don’t know the bisexual input into Pilling [...], it appears that there weren’t any openly bi people involved in the groups of *Living in Love and Faith*. This is one of the things I keep talking about - the lack of experience’ (lines 232 – 237, p. 8)²⁷

How do we know if any bisexual individuals were asked to contribute to *Issues*? The answer is, we do not, and why might this be? For all of its flaws, it is important to remember that *Issues* was a product of its time; British society was not an environment that fostered a culture in which an individual could come out. Therefore, even if someone involved in *Issues* was bisexual, there may not have been

²⁷ For clarification, the ‘inadequacy’ that LLF004 refers to focuses on the lack of bisexual individuals involved in the creation of texts. Through a lack of bisexual involvement (that we can deduce), LLF004 does not believe that these texts could therefore adequately support the bisexual community or understand their experiences.

a way for anyone to know this, as they likely would not have been open about their sexuality; an attitude of ‘don’t ask, don’t tell’ was prevalent within society, with public conversations about sexuality generally focused on heterosexuality. Discussions surrounding sexuality often excluded or marginalised bisexual, gay, or lesbian people and coming out as LGBT+ was a much rarer and riskier event, particularly in conservative circles or in smaller communities. *Issues* was published in the early 1990s, at a time when attitudes towards same-gender couples were starkly different to the present day (although even 30+ years on, the Church is still not where it could be). During the time of *Issues*, there was still disparity in the heterosexual and homosexual age of consent; it was not until the year 2000 that the Sexual Offences (Amendment) Bill entered UK law, equalising the age of consent. In the early ‘90s, when *Issues* was published, Section 28, which banned local authorities from promoting homosexuality and ‘effectively erased’ LGBT+ dialogue and identities (White *et al.*, 2018, p. 492), was still very much in force. Same- sex marriage was 20 years away, the HIV/AIDs crisis was still rampant, and gender equality was still non-existent in the Church (although women were finally permitted to be ordained into the priesthood one year post *Issues* publication, in 1992). The Church of England, along with other religious institutions, upheld traditional views on marriage and sexuality, reinforcing heteronormativity. The church's teachings viewed heterosexual marriage as the ideal and considered non-heteronormative relationships, including same-sex relationships, as sinful. In a heteronormative world that was still coming to terms with the binary of homosexuality and heterosexuality, bisexuality was still struggling to find its place, and for those who would have read or been exposed to *Issues*, the document did not support or encourage those who may already have felt less normal for being attracted to more than one gender.

The ‘lack of bisexual experience’ referenced by LLF004 is not only privy to the CofE but is evident in research circles as well. In their 2020 (p. 252) study, Beach and Hall discuss the 2019

Bisexual Health Research Workshop, stating that ‘throughout the day [...] bisexual community stakeholders emphasised critical flaws in the research infrastructure tied to the systematic marginalisation of bisexuality, including the underrepresentation of bisexually identified researchers in science and the lack of bisexual community input throughout the research process’. Castleman (2016) further references a (to note – unethical) study, in which it was declared that bisexuality simply did not exist. The study, undertaken in 2005 by researchers at Northwestern University, involved an experiment in which young men – who identified as straight, gay, or bisexual – were tasked to watch homosexual and heterosexual erotic videos in order to detect arousal. As none of the men who identified as bisexual were aroused by both sets of videos, the research team concluded that the participants in the experiment were either ‘straight, gay, or lying’. Shaw (2022, p. 9), a bisexual psychologist, stated in her debut book on bisexuality that ‘this article made a lot of people very, very angry. Including me’. Alongside Engleberg and Lawton, Shaw (2022, p. 10) argued that ‘in most academic disciplines that study sexuality, bisexuality is treated as an identity that does not need any kind of physiological response. This is also how sexuality is enshrined in (anti-) discrimination laws in countries including the UK, Canada, Germany, and the US. As such, no sexual identity can, or should, be measured physiologically’.

To return to both Jessica and LLF004, I argue that the potential lack of bisexual input into *Issues*, alongside wider limitations of bisexual input into research studies, only exacerbates society’s misunderstandings of bisexuality, and the CofE is not free of this accusation. Unfaithfulness and promiscuity are arguably the biggest misconceptions that bisexuals suffer through, and it is not fair to the bisexual Christian community that their Church continues to perpetuate this incorrect stereotype.

4.7.3 Perceived unfaithfulness

Let us now return to this particular use of the word ‘unfaithful’. Lauren shares that when she came out as bisexual, she felt as if she had to combat preconceived misunderstandings that people she knew already had:

BC004: ‘The fact it likens bisexual people to like, non-monogamy, which is again something that I came up against a lot when I came out to people, not Christians but like, everyone. When I first came out, I felt like I had to define what I was to everyone and people were saying “oh, you know, who’s going to date you if you’re just going to go off with someone else?” and that’s so harmful and untrue’ (lines 269 – 274, p. 10)

Bisexuals who engage in monogamous relationships with an individual of the same gender, or another gender, are seen as fulfilling a heterosexual or homosexual desire, as opposed to living within their bisexual identity. Even for those who engage in monogamy and are in a committed relationship, there is still an incorrect assumption that the bisexual individual will engage in relations with someone else (‘ideally’, someone of another gender to the bisexual’s current partner) in order to ‘fulfil’ their bisexual desires. This misunderstanding reflects a broader heteronormative tendency to view bisexuality through the lens of hetero- or homosexual identities, disregarding the validity of bisexuality within monogamous relationships and perpetuating the assumption that bisexual individuals must ‘fulfil’ their desires outside of committed partnerships. Therefore, ‘the bisexual’s ability to form relationships with members of both sexes is interpreted as a need for relationships with members of both sexes, a need that cannot be fulfilled by one relationship and therefore dooms the bisexual to a life of promiscuity’, something that Garnets and Kimmel (2003, p. 476) describe as an ‘absurd[ity] [sic] [...] leap of logic’. Considering her own position, Anderson (1992, p. 171) states that when forming a relationship with a woman, by identifying as bisexual, that meant ““that I was declaring... my need to have my cake and eat it too. . . so the hardest part was convincing her [my partner]... that I did not need

a man and a woman in my life to be [bisexual]; that one person could fulfil me”’.

4.7.4 Section summary

When considering opinions of bisexuality in the CofE, is there any theological grounding to support the Church describing bisexuals as inherently unfaithful? Ben would argue that no, there is not:

BC010: ‘No, weirdly, weirdly, I just love that idea of like, bisexuality being intrinsically unfaithful because I’m just like... no, it makes no difference, why, and the fact that’s not even anything biblical, it’s not coming from, that’s literally just a misconception of bisexuality within the general public, and that’s not even based on anything scriptural, or whatever’ (lines 205 – 208, p. 7)

LLF001 believes this argument to be ‘clearly problematic’:

‘The discussion of bisexuality, particularly in *Issues* is... it’s clearly really problematic because actually it doesn’t represent, you know, it seems to be based on just a misunderstanding, a kind of mis-definition, because it carries the assumption that if you are a bisexual that means by definition you will be in relationships with people of different sexes at the same time. So almost a conflation of bisexuality with polyamory, not that they say that explicitly, but that’s what the logic seems to be’ (lines 53 – 58, p. 2)

These experiences lead us to question how the Church can expand its understanding to avoid confusing bisexuality with polyamory. The lack of development in bisexual discourse leaves the bisexual community without confidence that the Church no longer perceives them as promiscuous or unfaithful, which raises the pressing question: how can this change? As Ben’s comment highlights, there is no theological basis for these assumptions. Instead, the Church may be reflecting wider societal trends, where bisexuality is viewed as outside the normative boundaries of heterosexuality and homosexuality. In this context, the assumption that bisexuality is linked to infidelity stems from the

heteronormative framework that prioritises binary gender and sexual norms. However, as societal understandings evolve and identities such as bisexuality are increasingly recognised for their true meaning, should the Church not also adapt, acknowledging the lived experiences of its bisexual members and moving beyond these limiting stereotypes?

4.8 ‘Truth of their personality [...] achieve a degree of inner healing’

‘In the situation of the bisexual it can also be that counselling will help the person concerned to discover the truth of their personality and to achieve a degree of inner healing’ (Lines 8 – 10, p. 42)

When reaching the final few lines of the reading task, a veil of concern shadowed participants from both groups. Ruth, for example, was particularly concerned at the use of ‘counselling’, which to her presented the idea of conversion therapy, a topic which was prevalent in UK news during her time of interview:

BC006: ‘The counselling bit is very worrying, because that to me is a kind of, veiled description of conversion therapy, which still hasn’t properly been illegalised in this country, so that is worrying’ (lines 329 – 331, p. 12)

Conversion therapy has been a consistent topic of discussion in the UK in recent years, but is not a new phenomenon, nor is it a new topic of discussion²⁸. In 2018 (p. 3), the results of the National LGBT Survey showed that 2% of respondents to the survey had undergone conversion therapy, with a further 5% having been offered it. In recent years, the UK government has pledged to ban conversion therapy for LGBT+ individuals, but the plans have been somewhat tumultuous: at one point, plans to ban conversion therapy were scrapped entirely, and when reinstated, the plans did not include those who identify as transgender. The most recent plans for the ban now include transgender individuals

²⁸ A comprehensive definition of conversion therapy is noted in footnote 2, in the introduction to this thesis.

(bbc.co.uk, 2023a). The ban was not included in the 2023 King's Speech (bbc.co.uk, 2023b).

Throughout this process of government discussion, there was backlash from some religious communities, with organisations such as the Evangelical Alliance arguing that a ban on conversion therapy could restrict religious freedom. However, some religious groups have supported the ban prior to discussions happening in Parliament. In 2017, the CofE issued a statement supporting the ban on conversion therapy. Conversion therapy was described as 'unethical, harmful, and having 'no place in the modern world'. One may assume, therefore, that the CofE has a so-called 'free pass' from engaging in discussions about conversion therapy. However, as the introduction to this thesis shows, conversion therapy was again a topic of discussion at the 2021 General Synod, in relation to *Issues* in particular. Whilst, as stated by Bishop Mullally, *Issues* itself does not explicitly recommend conversion therapy, it is understandable why in a modern context that it is understood in this way. To the bisexual participants interviewed, many of whom had not seen this passage before, or had not fully engaged with the language, they immediately agreed that this passage seemed to condone conversion therapy for bisexuals.

Jessica believes that this concept of achieving 'inner healing; through counselling is both ironic and toxic due to the harm that conversion therapy has been shown to cause:

BC005: '[The concept of healing is] so ironic, like it's so ironic, seeing that, basically saying that conversion therapy will achieve a degree of inner healing when it has been shown so many times the harm that conversion therapy causes. It's completely out of touch and completely misinformed really' (lines 303 – 306, p. 9)

Whilst there is limited research that focuses specifically on bisexual experiences of conversion

therapy, research into the experiences of lesbian, gay and bisexual individuals who have undergone conversion therapy provide an insight into the harms that conversion therapy causes (Bieschke, Paul and Blasko, 2007; Blackwell, 2008; McGeorge, Carlson and Toomey, 2015), including insights into the repercussions of ‘failed’ conversion therapy, ‘expulsion from family, loss of position in society, rejection from familiar institutions, loss of opportunities to raise children, loss of faith and community, and vulnerability to anti-gay prejudice’ (Haldeman, 2002, p. 120). Even if the Church argues that this passage was never meant to encourage the bisexual community to undergo conversion therapy, it is clear that these bisexual participants understand the passage in this way, and arguably – when considering a passage that discusses the bisexual community – said community has the ultimate say in the way that Church language affects them. This language of ‘healing’ implies that non-heterosexual identities are abnormal, requiring correction or help. Heteronormativity assumes that heterosexuality is the natural, desirable, and most valid sexual orientation, whilst any deviation from this norm is viewed as problematic. By framing bisexuality as something that needs to be healed or fixed, the Church reinforces the idea that bisexual individuals are ‘sick’ (to quote Thatcher) or in need of intervention, rather than accepting their identity as a legitimate expression of sexuality. In *Some Issues*, Thatcher (1993, p. 156) challenges the need for inner healing for bisexuals, arguing ‘the reference to healing makes sense only if one is sick’; I argue that emphasis should be placed on ‘only’ and ‘if’ here; bisexuals are not sick, and their identity is not an illness, therefore this pressure of healing should not apply to them.

4.8.1 What is the bisexual ‘truth’ of personality?

Jessica believed that this particular phrase emphasised how unnatural bisexuality was in the eyes of the Church, and how it should be removed, or cleansed, in favour of heterosexuality:

BC005: ‘The “truth of the personality”, it's almost like they are saying that bisexuality is not a truth, it's something that's been sort of like, forced into us or sort of like, nurtured into us kind of thing, by society or the devil or whatever, and we need to sort of, get rid of that and find our true selves, and our true selves will always be heterosexual, you know, it's weird’ (lines 296 – 299, p. 8)

For Christians who identify as LGBT+, trying to find a way to both come out and exist within the Church can sometimes be ‘a complex and often difficult process’ (Rosario, Schrimshaw, and Hunter, 2011, p. 4), and attempting to build an identity that one finds acceptable can often lead to confusion, ‘either because an invalid identity has been assumed or foisted upon one’ (Rosario, Schrimshaw, and Hunter, 2011, p. 4). In order to be deemed acceptable, LGBT+ Christians may choose to stay ‘in the closet’ at church, particularly if they are heavily involved in the life of their religious community; ‘in religious individuals, this secrecy is particularly associated with increased involvement in religious activities’ (Lapinski and McKirnan, 2013, p. 855). When then involved in queer circles, they may choose to hide their religious affiliation. This selective disclosure reflects the principles of lived religion, where faith is not only shaped by formal doctrine but also by personal, everyday negotiations of identity. For bisexual Christians, the struggle is not just theological but deeply embedded in their lived experiences, where they must constantly adapt to different social expectations in religious and queer spaces. Gaining this acceptance in a religious setting can often be the ‘make or break’ point for many LGBT+ Christians, underlying ‘the crucial transition from identity formation to identity integration, and is vital in resolving conflict between an individual’s religious and sexual identity’ (Lapinski and McKirnan, 2013, p. 855). Lapinski and McKirnan’s (2013) research emphasises that forming identity as an LGB+ Christian is already fraught, due to constantly battling between balancing religious and sexual identities, as for many, they may have been made to feel as if their emotions and sexual attractions are incorrect. With this in mind, the CofE’s attitude in *Issues* is arguably even worse than already assumed; it does not matter that bisexual Christians may be battling

truly confusing feelings that lead to mental anguish. Instead, they should still seek healing through careful counselling and prayer, so that they can understand their ‘truth’ – one that fits comfortably into an organisationally agreed binary. By upholding this binary, the Church of England implicitly delegitimises bisexuality, as it does not conform to the expected alignment of attraction and gender within religious marriage.

Eve believes that this particular quotation from *Issues* emphasises the notion that bisexuals do not truly understand their identity, and are instead confused, and need help to discover real identity:

BC003: ‘I think this rhetoric of like, discovering the truth of their personality as well just shows the underlying assumption that this isn’t the true nature of who they are, that that’s some underlying essence of them that is not bisexual or that they’re confused and they need to be brought back to where they are’ (lines 179 – 182, p. 7)

Lingwood (2010, p. 34), one of the only scholars to comment directly on *Issues* in the world of bisexual Christian theology, echoes this idea of confusion:

‘Advice [is] given to bisexuals to get counselling to discover the truth about themselves. The assumption being that bisexuality is not a truth about themselves, but a lie, a delusion, a confusion. To be bisexual is to live a lie, and it is an unhealthy lie, as suggested by the statement that counselling will give the bisexual healing by giving them a “truer” identity, rather than this bisexual confusion’.

Bisexuality in the CofE is seen as something that can be changed, a transitional confusion that can lead to an ultimate truth, and an apparent ‘healing’ of oneself.

4.8.2 Section summary

I would like to summarise this section with a quotation from Ben:

BC010: ‘Wow, I just, I love the mixture of like perpetuating like, myths about like bisexual promiscuity, combined with like, the bit of spicy conversion therapy talk, oh... Yeah that’s, I mean that’s just... hilariously bad. You’ve got to laugh because otherwise it’s just depressing’ (lines 199 – 201, p. 7)

Ben is right, the current circumstances are depressing. It is no surprise that, in a modern context, *Issues* seems to suggest that bisexuals should consider conversion therapy in order to find their truth, even if this is not what the text was apparently suggesting (as noted by Bishop Mullally in the introduction to this thesis). What is even more depressing is the lack of apology to the bisexual community for using language that suggests that conversion therapy, or to quote *Issues* directly, some form of counselling that leads to ‘inner healing’ is suitable for the bisexual community. Yet again, as time continues to move on, the language in Section 5.8 continues to show itself to be unfashionable, echoing outdated stereotypes that bisexuals are confused and moving through a transitional phase. In light of the recent debates on conversion therapy, language of counselling and healing is particularly concerning, and is yet another piece of language that the CofE desperately needs to apologise for.

4.9 What has happened, and what should happen next?

A critical analysis of Section 5.8 of *Issues*, through the eyes of both sets of interview participants, has proven how serious it is that the Church’s use of language is reconsidered. The following recommendations highlight what I argue to be critical steps that the Church should consider taking, when aiming to understand the impact of language on minority communities within its congregations.

4.9.1 Removing *Issues* from the Church of England ordination process

It cannot be denied that discussions on sexuality in the CofE have somewhat progressed. As of the end of 2023, and during the time in which this thesis was written, the CofE has removed *Issues* from the ordination process, which means that ordinands no longer have to assent to the document and agree to live within its guidelines. This is indeed a positive step, as the concept of assenting to the text was questionable. In an overall context, and considering other texts and discussions circulating at the time of *Issues* release, LLF001 believes:

‘It’s sort of staggering that it [*Issues*] still has the status that it has, kind of all this time later [...] I’m sure you know that actually *Issues* was [...] a step again in a more conservative direction, in comparison to some of the other explorations that had taken place before...’ (lines 33 – 36, p. 2)

LLF001 is arguably referring here to the Osborne Report, where discussions were ‘far more kind of liberal [...] were far more open but actually, they didn’t land because the landscape was not such that they could have landed at that time, if you see what I mean’ (lines 227 – 229, p. 7). Perhaps this lack of ability to land, which I would argue, is due to the heteronormative and binaried landscape of the Church, was what allowed *Issues* to move its way through to publication, and for its narrow language to be accepted. Considering the present day, at the time of interview, LLF003 hoped that ‘whatever legislative process eventually happens at Synod, it will involve a removal of *Issues* as the thing that people have to sign [...] or having that kind of formal status because [...] *Issues* represents only one very narrow part of the spectrum of Church of England opinion’ (Lines 55 – 60, pp. 2 – 3).

LLF002 themselves questions this idea of ‘assenting’ to a text, asking:

‘There is that word ‘assent’, you know, what does ‘assent’ mean? And you assent to *Issues*, does it mean you agree with it, or does it mean you assent to the existence of a document called *Issues*?’ (lines 279 – 281, p. 9)

LLF004, commenting on *Issues* before its removal from the ordination process, believed it to be truly shocking that this document was part of the ordination process at all, and believed that the document ‘should go’ (line 137, p. 5):

‘It is... shocking, utterly shocking, that this document became used, as a way, as a test for ordinands’ (lines 138 – 139, p. 5)

It is often queried in wider CofE circles if ordinands must strictly abide by the text, with some dioceses having previously (now that the document has been removed) allowed ordinands to take a more relaxed approach towards the text. LLF004 shared, when discussing this process, that ‘when [comment redacted due to Chatham House rules] was asked about it [*Issues*], [*they*] said ‘you have to live by it, you don’t have to agree with it, but you have to live by it’’ (line 174, p. 6).

Despite the removal of this passage from the ordination process, the question still stands as to whether *Issues* is still seen as ‘the’ policy position on sexuality, which means that we must then consider how this continues to affect the bisexual community. Removing the document from the ordination process does nothing to quell the harmful language presented in Section 5.8 that has caused the bisexual community in the CofE so much pain. Further dialogue of how a wider removal of *Issues* can positively impact the bisexual community will be discussed shortly.

4.9.2 Considering *Living in Love and Faith*, and the Bishops' update

Bishops within the Church of England have released a document, following the 2020 release of *LLF*, stating that they are aware that they need to educate themselves further on certain gender and sexual identities, bisexuality included. However, no indication has been given to how this will happen, and perhaps most importantly, there has been no specific recognition of the impact of the painful language that exists within Section 5.8 in *Issues*. We therefore can have grounds to assume that the Bishops, even whilst wanting to learn more about bisexuality, still uphold Section 5.8 as their ultimate opinion, as whilst bisexuality has been addressed briefly in both *The Pilling Report* and *LLF*, there has never been an official statement indicating that these views have changed, and *Issues* remains a reference point for the Church, even as it becomes more outdated.

4.9.2a Was LLF 'good' for the bisexual community?

Whilst *LLF* had not been planned as a particular discussion point with the bisexual participants I interviewed, for those that wanted to discuss it, it gave the opportunity to consider together what more the Church needs to do to properly re-acknowledge bisexuality, and whether *LLF* can actually be considered a step forward. In turn, discussing *LLF* with the bisexual Christian participants provided further opportunities to compare and contrast the views and understandings of both sets of participants. The bisexual participants were not asked to engage with an overwhelming amount of literature, as I was not interviewing this group of participants to assess their levels of understanding. *If* other documentation came up in discussion, then these discussions were free to progress. Different experiences of faith, and different ways of engaging with the *LLF* programme, also affected the way the bisexual group responded to the text. Some participants had come to the CofE through other Christian denominations such as Quakerism or United Reformed Church, and therefore were able to identify sexuality documents or policy within those denominations, allowing themselves to compare

the experiences. When considering engagement with *LLF*, some participants had taken part in the short course within their churches or other Christian groups, others had read the text, either fully or just certain parts, some had engaged with the website content, and some were aware of the text but did not want to engage with it, because they believed the text would be disappointing, or would let them down.

Participant attitudes towards *LLF* are mixed, but ultimately, it is not seen as a document that can move the Church forward when thinking about bisexuality. Katie and Danielle both view the text, overall, as disappointing. Whilst they did not comment specifically on the lack of bisexual discussion in the text, they did believe that it was not a suitable step forward and did not provide anything positive for the LGBT+ community:

BC001: ‘It’s just so hand hold-y, it doesn’t say anything, it is just like the idiot’s guide to sexuality without actually saying anything about sexuality’ – *Katie* (lines 381 – 382, p. 12)

BC008: ‘I can’t think of a worse book to recommend. It’s confusing, it’s long-winded, and it’s homophobic’ – *Danielle* (lines 240 – 241, p. 9)

Jessica considered *LLF* in a wider context, thinking back to her participant focus group, and considered that *LLF* is perhaps not ‘for’ the LGBT+ community, but for those who are attempting to understand sexuality for the first time:

BC005: ‘I think it was within our focus group that someone was saying it [*LLF*] is actually more orientated for people who aren’t that knowledgeable about these things, so you know, maybe it’s not fair for me to be like “oh, it’s not that useful”, because maybe for someone who has no idea about these things, it might be quite useful. But I suppose it feels like it, from what I’ve heard, it’s quite a small step for reaching this goal of equality in the Church [...] I don’t think it’s a revolutionary thing’ (lines 262 – 268, p. 8)

Katie believes that *LLF* will do nothing to calm the homophobia that continues to exist within the CofE. With its serious lack of bisexual discussion, mentioned just 29 times over 450- plus pages, it could be argued that *LLF* will also be unable to tackle the biphobia that also continues to exist within the Church:

BC001: ‘It’s going to do nothing to quell the homophobic voices of the church and it’s going to do nothing to satisfy the queer community of the church that is so vastly under- represented’ (lines 388 – 390, p. 13)

LLF003 themselves, when alerted to the number of times bisexuality appeared in *LLF*, was surprised by this number, as they rarely remembered bisexuality being a focal point of discussion. I would argue that this underpins Katie’s thoughts, as how can a Church tackle biphobia when it is barely recognised still?

LLF003: ‘I mean my memory is not fantastic for all of the process - there was an awful lot of it - but I don’t think we ever really had bisexuality as a sort of focus of our discussions [...] I don’t think there was any stage where we sort of took a step back and said ‘well how does this look from the point of bisexuality?’ and, you know, ‘what bisexual people have we got involved?’, scrutinising from that angle’ (lines 134 – 143, p. 5)

LLF003 is not alone in their opinion of *LLF* when considering bisexuality. **LLF001** believed that the text did not ‘succeed[ed] in doing that [addressing misconceptions of bisexuality] [...] I don’t remember there ever being actually any explicit discussion of bisexuality and I don’t remember bi people ever being mentioned except in the context of ‘lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender’ et cetera’ (lines 61 – 64, p. 2). In fact, **LLF001** stated that only two bisexual participants were spoken to, presenting a real ‘missed opportunity’ (line 112, p. 4). This is in real contrast to documents such as The Pilling Report, which ‘invite[d] contributions from lots and lot of different people [...] it was coming from a place of wanting to say ‘look there needs to be consultation, [...] we’re aware that actually we

are not entirely equipped necessarily to [...] be able to answer some of this [...] Pilling was really well meaning' (LLF001, lines 9 – 10, p. 1).

However, perhaps not all hope should be lost. LLF005 allows us to feel positive about *LLF* as a text. They believe it has been an extraordinary project, unlike equivalent attempts to inform and discern. The *LLF* project has been ambitious, and through its educational programme has drawn many people into the conversation of sexuality, which has been a struggle in the CofE's past. LLF005 stated that there will often be situations, as there has been within this research process, where the text may be set alongside previous documents such as *Issues* or The Pilling Report, and it will be named as the 'latest equivalent'. However, *LLF* is far more than just a 450-plus-page book and study programme and should not be compared to documents from the past, as it attempts to tackle issues in a different way. *LLF* was designed to encourage open discussions about identity, sexuality, relationships, and marriage, and as an initiative, provided an opportunity to challenge heteronormativity in several key ways. I would argue that by encouraging conversations that include LGBT+ perspectives - an action, as discussed, that was only true present within The Pilling Report - *LLF* allows non-heterosexual individuals to share their experiences of faith and identity, challenging the assumption that Christian relationships are exclusively heterosexual. The *LLF* project invites the Church to reconsider its teachings on relationships. If marriage is understood primarily in terms of love, commitment, and faithfulness rather than strict gender roles, this encourages conversation surrounding greater inclusion of LGBT+ relationships.

LLF005 is proud to be associated with the *LLF* process, and its attempts to provide a fresh look at human sexuality. They remind us, finally, that there is a distinction to be made between policy settlement enshrined in *Issues*, which remains current, and language which is transparently outdated.

LLF, very deliberately, does not reach a conclusion; the aim of the text is to form a discernment process, to allow the CofE to be led by the Holy Spirit. Therefore, it cannot be the ‘next’ document, in other words, a replacement to *Issues*. *LLF* does not attempt to define a new position for the Church but instead wants to inform conversations. Ultimately, **LLF005** agrees that the language in *Issues* does not reflect the lived experience of bisexual people and hopes that *LLF* does this more adequately – but it is up to bisexual people to say whether or not this is the case. If the language of the bisexual participants is anything to go by, whilst the text aims to create dialogue that challenges heteronormativity, alongside intending to create links between LGBT+ relationships and Christian love, *LLF* has been just as inadequate as previous documents in amplifying the bisexual lived experience, emphasising that the CofE still has strides to take in sharing its understandings of the modern bisexual Christian community.

4.9.3 Returning to the research questions: what does the Church need to change?

At the beginning of this chapter, the following four sub questions were considered in light of this thesis’ research statements:

RQ1: What are the bisexual stereotypes that exist within the CofE, and how can these be combatted?

RQ2: How can language play a part in encouraging, and battling, these stereotypes?

RQ3: When we consider the relevance or context of this language, how can we then forge a path to move forward to create more inclusive Christian language for bisexuals?

RQ4: How can the Church engage with bisexual Christians in order to change what it has to say?

As the critical participant analysis of Section 5.8 of *Issues* has shown, alongside comments regarding the success (or perhaps, lack of) of *LLF*, it is ultimately clear that the CofE must develop its language, and change its statements, on bisexuality. Current CofE publications and policy that exist do not reflect the experiences of the bisexual community. **LLF002** argues that ‘they [Church of England policy documents] don’t, they don’t reflect a lot of people’s lived experience I expect. But certainly

bisexual, no, not there at all’ (line 358, p. 12) and that *Issues*, in itself, is ‘the most dated thing imaginable’ (line 21, p. 1). LLF003 believes that the CofE has a ‘pretty shocking history in this area’ (line 12, p. 1) and despite being willing to involve themselves with the *LLF* process, actually questioned how ‘proud’ they may be to take part: ‘I got involved in *LLF* explicitly telling myself that, you know, ‘you’re going to do however many years of your life being involved in this, and you’ll probably be ashamed of whatever comes out of it’, given what the Church of England has done in the past’ (lines 29 – 31, p. 2).

If even those who are involved in the development and creation of Church documents believe that changes still need to be made, then this argument becomes ever more critical. With these factors in mind, and moving forward, I recommended that the CofE takes the following steps to improve its understanding and language surrounding the bisexual community, in order to make the Church itself a more welcoming place for bisexuals, and one that recognises their lived experience and reflects this within its language.

4.9.3a A complete removal of Issues, and an apology for Section 5.8?

Issues, as we have noted, has already been removed from the ordination process. However, Section 5.8 itself still exists, and there has never been an apology to the bisexual community for the abhorrent language that it portrays. LLF005 argues that *Issues* is ‘toe-curlingly out of date’ and the language is not appropriate to our current culture. As a document, *Issues* is ‘well past its’ sell-by date [and] long overdue for a revision. It’s become embarrassing that this is our last statement on these matters’. Both the misunderstanding and belittling of experience that exists within Section 5.8, alongside the deeply negative language that this text portrays, only – according to LLF004 – ‘adds to the evidence

that this document [*Issues*] should be withdrawn as soon as possible’ (line 159, p. 5). Surely, these views would lead us to request a statement of recognition, of affirmation and love to the community and an understanding of the misrepresentations presented in language is the only way forward, so that the bisexual community can feel that they have been seen, and their struggles understood. Whilst these particular actions have not been outrightly called for by the participants in this study, I would argue that at least a recognition of wrongdoing, and a verbal understanding of past problems with language, would only show that the Bishops are true in their promises to learn more about bisexuality. Such a statement could project a movement in which the text itself could be removed entirely from any discussions on sexuality in the Church of England. I argue that whilst the Church cannot change its history, and whilst the text itself was certainly a product of its time, it is more imperative than ever that the CofE shows it is willing to develop its understandings, and to change and learn for the better.

4.9.3b Engage with the lived experience of bisexual Christians

The CofE must now be willing to engage with the bisexual Christian community and to immerse themselves in the lived religious experiences of bisexual Christians, in order truly understand the complexities they face, and to learn the ways in which this community exists. A previous potential lack of bisexual input into policy and documentation is not acceptable, and the bisexual community should be openly encouraged to support the development of future policy and publications. LLF004 believes that, when it comes to bisexuality, most CofE documents can only be described as ‘inadequate’:

‘Look, these documents can only be inadequate, of course they can, because we don’t know who the bisexuals were behind *Issues*, if any, [...] we don’t know the bisexual input into *Pilling* [...], it appears that there weren’t any openly bi people involved in the groups of *Living in Love and Faith*... this is one of the things I keep talking about, the lack of experience’ (lines 231 – 236, p. 8)²⁹

²⁹ See Footnote 27 for further comments on LLF004’s statement of ‘inadequacy’.

LLF004 also recognises that this lack of representation has happened before with the Church in previous texts:

‘There’s a whole swathe of experience that is just not represented in these documents, in the way that earlier on it was tran and intersex, now it’s bisexuality that seems to be a missing element’(lines 241 – 243, p. 8).

The CofE is nowhere near close to truly understanding the bisexual Christian lived experience, and this will only be achieved through thorough engagement with those who the Church currently seems incapable of writing about. Through proactive engagement tasks such as workshops, focus groups, qualitative and quantitative research, and tailored pastoral support, the CofE will be able to build a strong foundation upon which the bisexual Christian experience can be shared, and ultimately, reflected in Church publication and policy. Bisexual Christians face a multitude of complexities, and their experiences are not the same as other Christians within the LGBT+ community; this is something that the Church of England truly needs to recognise.

4.9.3c Encouraging visibility through positive language

Whilst some bisexuals may openly be able to claim that they feel welcomed within their Church spaces, this is not the case for all, with some bisexuals feeling truly invisible within their Christian communities. One such way that bisexual visibility can be improved is through the use of positive language, and, potentially, creating a new statement on bisexuality, but only if this is the right thing to do. LLF004 shares that life for LGBT+ folk in the Church of England can be tricky when their experiences and visibilities are denied, and this is true for the bisexual community:

‘Life on the ground for LGBT people can be very painful, people can feel that they need to

leave their churches... their reality, their experiences [are] denied and I guess, this is what's behind your project really, about a particular narrative, a really hopeless narrative about bi people, because bi people are particularly hidden' (lines 10 – 14, p. 1)

LLF005 argues that if bisexual individuals do not feel that every congregation in the CofE is safe and supportive, then there is still work to be done. During their interview, the participant was unsure if specific and specialised support networks existed for bisexual Christians in the Church and believed that this would need to be confirmed by a bisexual person themselves, who can confidently express that these groups offer adequate support. The bisexual community, ultimately, should not be spoken for. Instead, they should be able to speak for themselves on matters that concern them. Through the Church providing a space for bisexual Christians to share their voice, this can increase visibility and create welcoming spaces for those within the bisexual community.

When considering new policy, new language and publications should be developed in light of lived experiences – but is another document the way forward? As shown, if anything *LLF* has provided less information on the bisexual experience than *Issues* did. We must consider therefore, do we need another document to amplify voices, or do we need to focus on listening to lived experiences and actively sharing this throughout the Church, instead of creating a document that some may choose not to read? LLF002 believes that just trying to 'replace' *Issues* wouldn't work:

'There was some suggestion that [...] would suggest that *LLF* could take over [from *Issues*], but how can *LLF* take over when the whole point of the document is that it does give more than one viewpoint? There's a certain amount of 'some of us think that, but others think this'. So how can you have a document that you have to say you've read and you will live within it if it says 'some people say this, some people say that'? Why bother with a document?' (lines 239 – 244, p. 8)

Ultimately, it is the decision of the bisexual community to decide what they believe would be more suitable: would a policy document create the much-needed visibility that the community deserves, or would an amplification of voices and a space for sharing of lived experiences be better?

4.10 To conclude

Bisexuality, according to LLF002, has had ‘more erasure than any other group, which is extraordinary’ (line 110, p. 4). Whilst bisexual Christian theology is perhaps not as prominent as wider LGBT+ theological discussions, the field is growing. Therefore, the Church has no excuse and should be actively choosing to educate itself on the experiences of bisexual Christians. As LLF004 argues:

‘If the Church wants to say something about bisexuality, then it should, it should get up to the day, up to the minute information. Carol Shepherd has written *Bisexuality and the Western Christian Church*. There are books by people describing their experiences as bisexuals in the Church’ (lines 154–156, p. 5).

LLF004 shared during their interview that they had engaged in a project where one of the other participants was bisexual. This participant was male, married to a woman, and had children with his wife. He therefore felt that, as a bisexual, he was ‘hiding in plain sight’ (line 29, p. 2), as those around him assumed his heterosexuality due to his marital and familial status. This reflects the ways in which heteronormative frameworks can obscure the visibility and legitimacy of bisexual identities. Within such structures, bisexual Christians may encounter a range of challenges, including the marginalisation, misrecognition, or dismissal of their sexual identity in discourses surrounding faith, relationships, and belonging. With this in mind, it is obvious that bisexuality is both a ‘forgotten and hidden dimension’ (line 157, p. 5) in the Church of England, one that is embroiled in stigma and stereotypes. LLF004 also believes that the Church is uncomfortable with the dimension of bisexuality; ‘it does like everything in neat little boxes and everything tied up and sweet and rosy. It doesn’t like complexity. It doesn’t like

difference’ (lines 256–257, pp. 8–9).

This preference for simplicity extends into the Church’s institutional responses to sexuality. *Issues*, according to [LLF003](#), only represents ‘one very narrow part of the spectrum of Church of England opinion’ (line 60, p. 2), but even when we consider this, for those whom *Issues* represents, it is obvious that they, and the texts they adhere to, ‘are poor and [...] do not have the interests of queer people at heart’ ([BC010](#), lines 189–190, p. 6) as Ben laments. It is time for *Issues* to go; not just from the ordination process, as it did in January 2023, but to be removed entirely from theological opinion on sexuality. Will this happen? It is still hard to say. Even with its lack of real theological grounding, Section 5.8 still exists, and is still called upon even today when discussing bisexuality within the Church of England.

Yet, beyond the official doctrines and policies of the Church, bisexual Christians continue to live out their faith in ways that challenge these normative structures. Lived religion – the ways in which individuals and communities practice and embody their faith – reveals a far richer and more complex reality than institutional theology often allows. For many bisexual Christians, lived religion involves negotiating their identity in spaces that often fail to acknowledge them, crafting their own theologies, and forming support networks that affirm both their faith and sexuality. This day-to-day practice of faith demonstrates that the erasure of bisexuality is not only a theological issue but also a pastoral one; the Church’s inability to embrace bisexual Christians as they are can have real consequences for their spiritual lives. Perhaps at this stage, all the bisexual Christian community can continue to do is amplify their voices, share their experiences, live authentically, and hope that the Bishops are true to their promise in building their understandings of what bisexuality really is. Yet, the reality of lived religion suggests that, whether or not institutional change comes swiftly, bisexual Christians will continue to

practice their faith in ways that challenge the Church's assumptions. Their existence and their faithfulness serve as a testament to the fact that bisexuality is not, and has never been, incompatible with Christianity – only with rigid structures that refuse to acknowledge it.

Chapter 5

Redefining space: Towards an inclusive environment for bisexuality within the Church of England

BC005: ‘We're not going to get to a place soon anyway where everyone's totally accepting of same gender relationships, whatever. But being visible in these spaces and talking to people about it, as far as is possible, I think is important. Yeah, I think that's the only way we're gonna manage it’ – *Jessica* (lines 347 – 350, p. 10)

BC003: ‘Sometimes it's a bit of a flipping on and off switch, so you go in and then you're just a Christian, and then when you leave and you do something else you are bisexual, I don't feel like when I'm in church that I am a bisexual Christian [...] I'm constantly having to affirm, it kind of jostles between the two’ – *Eve* (lines 96 – 98, 106, p. 4)

‘When considering Eve's perspective, I wonder if she's ever really thought about worshipping in a different space, one where maybe she doesn't feel like she has to flip this switch between her two identities. But then I suppose what should really be asked here is why should she? And maybe why does such an environment exist in which Eve feels like this is what she has to do?’ (Research diary entry, 10/03/2022)

When we consider faith, often we are drawn to the ‘religious physicality’ (Gill, 1993, p. 3) of tangible religious spaces. However, the significance of religious spaces transcends mere physical boundaries; they are repositories of profound spiritual experiences, collective memories, and cultural identities (Vosyliūtė, 2007; Kilde, 2013). In the Christian tradition these spaces, ranging from grand cathedrals to humble chapels, hold a sacred aura that fosters worship, contemplation, and community. Across centuries, Christians have erected these structures to honour their beliefs, embody spiritual aspirations, and facilitate rituals. These spaces are not merely architectural marvels but serve as spaces in which believers seek solace and guidance. These physical entities provide houses of welcome and acceptance, where strangers can enter and leave as friends. Yet, as institutions shaped by historical and cultural forces, church spaces are also structured by dominant norms, which dictate whose identities and relationships are legitimised within religious life.

In the ever-changing landscape of modern society, the church institution has found itself amidst a profound transformation. In Britain, the growth of secularisation has meant that ‘all indices of religiosity [...] start[ed] to decline [...] the British people [have] started to reject the role of religion in their lives’ (Brown, 2013, p. 188); this ‘deep change’ in society is what, according to Brown and Woodhead (2017, p. 63) ‘brought the Church of England plunging downwards’. Amidst a rise of New Age and alternative spiritualities, and the downfall of ‘a societal order based around hierarchies of class, gender, and age’ (Brown and Woodhead, 2017, p. 69), traditional religious norms began to find themselves at odds with prevailing cultural currents, leaving many church spaces significantly emptier than they had been in the decades prior. These environments and spaces are shaped by cultural, historical, and theological forces that reinforce distinct social relations. Church of England institutional spaces, in particular, have been constructed through doctrines, liturgies and traditions that privilege heterosexuality, often positioning non-heterosexual identities as peripheral or problematic. These spatial norms manifest in explicit ways, such as policies on marriage or ordination, as well as more subtle forms of exclusion, such as the marginalisation of bisexuality in discussions of Christian sexuality. Spatial critical theory, examined below, offers a lens through which to examine how these normative structures are embedded in and reproduced through physical, symbolic, and lived church spaces, drawing attention to the ways power operates spatially to include, exclude, or regulate certain bodies and identities.

Spatial critical theory explores how space is not merely a physical backdrop to human activity but a socially produced and politically charged dimension of everyday life. It examines how power, identity, and ideology shape, and are shaped by, the spaces we inhabit and navigate (Soja, 1996; Massey, 2005). From classrooms to city streets, spaces reflect and reproduce norms around sexuality, faith, race, and class, often privileging certain bodies or identities whilst marginalising others (Ahmed,

2006; hooks, 2009; Thatcher, 2011). Central to this perspective is Henri Lefebvre's concept of the spatial triad – perceived, conceived, and lived space – which provides a framework for understanding how physical environments, representations of space, and personal experiences intersect to produce meaning.

When we consider Lefebvre's spatial triad (*The Production of Space*, 1974; reprint 1991), we can recognise the concept of conceived space in relation to institutional faith. Conceived space refers to space as it is planned, designed, and organised by those in power, such as architects, urban planners, religious authorities, and policymakers. This space is dominated by abstract representations, rules, and ideologies that structure how space should function according to institutional logic: Schmid (2022, pp. 277 – 282) argues this space to be the realm of maps, laws, theological doctrines, and organisational blueprints. Lefebvre's work allows us to explore how religious spaces are not simply neutral containers for spiritual activity but are actively produced by socio-political forces that embed particular moral geographies. The Church, through its architecture and governance, conceives spaces that privilege certain embodiments of faith and marginalise others.

Yet Lefebvre's framework also directs our attention to *lived space* – the third element of his triad – which resists and reinterprets the logic of the conceived. Lived space refers to how individuals inhabit and emotionally engage with space, investing it with meaning through everyday practices, desires, and memories. These spaces are 'qualitative, fluid, and dynamic [...] imbued with the imaginary and symbolism, and they have a history: the history of a people and the history of every individual belonging to that people' (Schmid, 2022, p. 283). It is here that we can begin to bridge the spatial with the religious by drawing upon lived religion. As noted earlier in this thesis, lived religion emphasises the everyday practices and embodied experiences of faith as they occur outside institutional

frameworks. Rather than focusing solely on formal doctrines or official rituals, lived religion highlights how individuals make sense of, adapt, and personalise their spirituality in real-life contexts. By integrating Lefebvre with lived religion, we appreciate how churchgoers, and particularly those on the margins of institutional legitimacy, such as LGBT+ individuals, navigate the contradictions between institutional conceptions of sacred space and their own lived experiences of faith. These individuals may reinterpret traditional spaces, imbue them with new symbolic meanings, or even carve out alternative sacred spaces within or beyond church walls that reflect their dual identities.

Doreen Massey's (2005, p. 66) insistence on space as relational, open, and politically contested complements this perspective. Her notion of a 'progressive sense of place' challenges fixed, essentialist understandings of space and instead argues for a view of place as continuously redefined through interactions and power dynamics. For Massey, place is not a static container but a process – a meeting point of trajectories and negotiations. This view encourages us to see church spaces not as inherently inclusive or exclusive, but as sites of potential transformation, where new meanings can be forged through contestation and lived experience. For LGBT+ people of faith, 'safe religious spaces and communities are vital' (Barbosa, Ribeiro, and Liechty, 2020, p. 227) for fostering social connections and navigating the intersection of religious and sexual identities – to exist and flourish within these spaces, LGBT+ individuals of faith may reappropriate religious language, reshape community rituals, or simply be present in a space that has historically excluded them. These everyday practices resonate with de Certeau's (1984, p. xix; p. 38) concept of tactics – subtle acts of spatial negotiation within institutional *strategies* – that work to reconfigure dominant religious geographies. Such acts, however small, enact a profound reimagining of sacred space, challenging hegemonic narratives and opening the possibility for more inclusive spiritual geographies. Church spaces, then, can be understood as dynamic and contested – continually reconstituted through the presence, resistance, and spiritual

agency of those who inhabit them.

In this context, we must ask: to what extent do religious institutions truly accommodate lived religious experiences that fall outside the heteronormative frameworks embedded in conceived space? And how might we better understand church spaces not only as theological constructs, but as social spaces actively negotiated and reshaped by those who dwell within them?

As Jessica and Eve alluded to at the beginning of this chapter, reinterpretation, visibility and community are essential for meaningful inclusion, yet the Church remains an institution where some feel they must ‘switch’ between their faith and sexual identities depending on the space they occupy. This reflects broader patterns of heteronormativity in religious life, where bisexuality is often rendered invisible or misunderstood, leaving bisexual Christians struggling to find spaces where they can live out both their faith and sexuality without compromise. This chapter, through a critical interpretive phenomenological analysis of both bisexual Christian and *LLF* participants interviewed for this thesis, will explore the concept of bisexual space and the challenges bisexual Christians face within church contexts. Drawing on the framework of lived religion, which considers how faith is practised and experienced beyond institutional doctrine, this chapter will examine the ways bisexual Christians navigate and reconfigure religious spaces to carve out a place for themselves. Ultimately, it aims to provide a roadmap for churches to evolve into spaces where bisexual individuals can not only exist but flourish, fostering a culture of genuine welcome, affirmation, and full participation within their faith communities.

5.1 Research statements

This chapter addresses **Research Statements 1, 2, and 3**, exploring how churches and Christian

spaces uniquely shape the experiences of bisexual individuals. The bisexual participants in this study shared the complexities they face when engaging with Church of England life and disclosing their identity, whether in seeking support and affirmation, navigating visibility and wariness, or challenging common misconceptions about bisexuality. These four broad themes serve as a foundation for understanding both the barriers and possibilities bisexual Christians encounter within church spaces. Crucially, this chapter situates these experiences within the wider structures of heteronormativity, which often dictate the ways in which relationships and identities are recognised – or rendered invisible – within Christian life and worship.

Beyond the perspectives of bisexual participants, this chapter also examines how church spaces are understood by those involved in Christian communities but not part of a minority sexual identity. Through the reflections of *LLF* participants, it considers how Christian spaces can reckon with their role in shaping, sustaining, or dismantling exclusionary norms. Drawing on lived religion, this chapter highlights how bisexual Christians navigate, adapt, and reinterpret church spaces in ways that allow them to sustain both their faith and their identity, even in environments that do not always fully affirm them. Finally, by bringing together these intersecting viewpoints, this chapter explores how factors such as affirmation, allyship, and amplifying marginalised voices can foster deeper connections within Christian communities. In doing so, it considers how churches might move beyond passive inclusion toward active affirmation, ensuring that bisexual Christians are not merely present but are able to flourish within spaces of worship and belonging.

5.2 Initial thoughts on language, and bisexual experience

To ensure clarity in this chapter, it is essential to establish key terminology and consider the

significance of language in shaping discussions on bisexuality and faith. Firstly, whilst this chapter primarily focuses on bisexual experiences, some participants also identified as queer. These terms are not used interchangeably without consideration; rather, they reflect the language participants used to describe their own identities. Arthur et al. (2013, p. 155) emphasise the importance of mirroring participants' terminology to accurately represent their experiences, stating 'it is important to be sensitive to the language and terminology used by people, and to 'mirror' it as far as possible', to immerse oneself in the experiences of the participant.

Secondly, bisexuality is often marginalised within both LGBT+ and Christian communities. Toft (2009, p. 67) notes that LGBT+ faith groups tend to focus primarily on 'gay issues,' rendering bisexuality invisible. This erasure stems from binary understandings of sexuality, which, as Shepherd (2019, p. 156) argues, are maintained to uphold existing power structures. The categorisation of individuals into rigid sexual identities can hinder self-understanding and contribute to the invisibility of bisexual Christians. The Stonewall Bi Report (2020, p. 6) highlights this issue, stating that 'bi people of faith are often invisible in narratives about LGBT inclusion in faith spaces.' If bisexuality remains unrecognised, how can truly inclusive spaces be created within the Church?

Lastly, language plays a crucial role in shaping perception and identity. The principle of linguistic relativity suggests that the words we use influence our understanding of the world. Kelly (2010, p. 311) highlights the importance of contextual sensitivity in qualitative research, noting that researchers must consider how participants express their experiences and why they choose particular language. This thesis employs Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to explore the nuances of language, recognising how words shape relationships, environments, and lived experiences. Whilst I consider myself an insider in this research, I remain open to learning from participants' language

choices to ensure an accurate and respectful representation of their realities.

5.3 Choosing space, and understandings its concepts

Amongst the various themes that emerged during the data analysis of this research study, I found the concept of 'space' to be particularly significant. This overarching theme sparked numerous discussions regarding how bisexual Christians envision their ideal space within the Christian community. 'Space' is a broad concept. Alongside 'place', it is one of the most fundamental concepts in the fields of social and human geography. The 'space vs. place' debate examines the way in which people interact with, and give meaning to, the physical environment around them. 'Space' refers to physical or geographical aspects of an area; its grid references on a map, its size, its location. Cresswell (2004, p. 8) argues that 'space is a more abstract concept than place'; it is objective, devoid of a personal or cultural significance. Tuan (1977, p. 6) posits that 'the ideas of 'space' and 'place' require each other for definition. From the security and stability of place we are aware of the openness, freedom, and the threat of space, and vice versa'. Place, as Tuan alludes to here, is a more subjective and socially constructed concept. It goes beyond the physical attributes of an area and includes the meaning and significance that people attach to it. Place is closely tied to human experiences, memories, and emotions, and cultural or religious associations. It represents a space that has been personalised, inhabited, and made meaningful through human activities and relationships.

5.3.1 Space and place for LGBT+ people

Whilst space and place may seem to exist as two rather separate concepts, the terms can often be used in place of one another, or together, in other fields. In Formby's (2017, p. 85) research on LGBT+ spaces and communities, she states that 'space and place can be interchangeable concepts', and 'use[s] both terms but mean for neither to be understood as exclusively physical or virtual

coordinates'. Giesecking (2016, pp. 14 - 20) also uses the terms interchangeably when discussing LGBT+ geographies. Individuals with LGBT+ identities may have to reclaim spaces, fight to exist in spaces where they are not welcome, or temporarily occupy spaces that may not be able to become 'places'; 'LGBTQ people often have fewer resources and access to capital, many LGBTQ places are impermanent and temporary – for example, rented, or borrowed spaces for meetings. This impermanence, however, does not necessarily lessen the importance of these places'. In a heteronormative society, where dominant cultural expectations uphold heterosexual relationships as the standard, the spaces and places that LGBT+ individuals inhabit are often shaped by the need to resist or navigate this normativity. Heteronormativity enforces not only the exclusion of non-heterosexual individuals but also the marginalisation of their spaces, further intensifying the struggle for LGBT+ people to create safe, welcoming environments. As such, the process of reclaiming space and place becomes not only a fight for visibility and recognition but also a response to the hegemonic norms that limit the freedom and permanence of queer spaces, rendering them transient, overlooked, or contested in a world where heterosexuality is typically seen as the default.

5.3.2 Space and place in religion and theology

Space and place are also interchangeable terms in religion and theology. Bergmann (2007, p. 354) argues that 'in accordance with biblical and classical theology, space could and should be regarded as the Creator's gift to the living, and place as the foundational dimension of reflecting on the Son's incarnation and the Spirit's inhabitation on Earth'. However, Knott (2008, p. 1105) shows how space and place can be imbued with multiple meanings in the religious world; 'we might think here of studies of sacred landscapes, pilgrimage routes, places of worship, missionary excursions, global religious developments, or cyber-religious networks'. For many religious believers, it could be argued that the concepts of space and place are transient, or in a process of always becoming, and that they become

sacred or meaningful whenever one feels able to connect with God. This aligns with the concept of ‘lived religion’, which emphasises how religious practices, beliefs, and experiences are shaped by the everyday actions and engagements of individuals rather than being confined to institutional or doctrinal boundaries. Lived religion suggests that religious meaning is not only found in the traditional, fixed spaces of worship but can emerge in everyday settings where individuals create sacredness through personal rituals, experiences, and interactions. Thus, the boundaries between sacred and secular places become fluid as religious individuals make spaces their own, transforming ordinary locations into places of spiritual significance. In this sense, space and place become part of a dynamic, ongoing process where the sacred is not static but continuously lived and reinterpreted through personal encounters with the divine.

5.3.3 Space and place for bisexuals

For bisexuals, especially those who exist within Christian communities, concepts of space and place can be fraught and confusing. As will be shown by the attitudes of some participants in this research, bisexuals feel both welcomed, yet unwelcomed, in many areas of life due to misunderstandings and confusion surrounding their identity. Bisexuals do ‘not necessarily take centre stage’ (Hemmings, 2002, p. 144) in any space they occupy. Bisexual spaces tend to exist alongside others, only able to exist in relation to other identities that provide a boundary for bisexuality to form itself between. Voss, Brown, and Gupta (2014, p. 1610) state that ‘the UK bi scene’, in particular, ‘has historically been found within short-term events’; since the 1980s, bisexuality has mostly existed within ‘temporary spaces’ (Shaw, 2022, p. 129). This impermanence reflects the broader normative framework of heteronormativity, which in turn marginalises bisexuality, relegating it to temporary spaces that challenge the fixed boundaries of heterosexual and homosexual identities. As a result, bisexual individuals often find themselves navigating multiple layers of exclusion, whether within

heteronormative environments or spaces that struggle to fully embrace their fluid identities.

It is important to recognise that bisexual spaces do exist. Shaw (2022, p. 130) refers to Bowes-Catton's fieldwork at 'BiCon', a bisexual convention held in the UK. For many attendees, BiCon 'was a unique space in which bisexuality was the default sexual identity and this was an immensely liberating experience'. The space created not only a sense of belonging for bisexual people, but 'gave individuals a sense of euphoria and boundlessness' (Shaw, 2022, p. 130). There was a small faith presence available at the event, giving bisexual Christians a faith space to flourish away from churches that may not fully recognise their identity. This echoes lived religion, where individuals carve out spiritual spaces that allow them to express their religious beliefs outside of institutional structures that may not fully support or understand their sexual identities. These spaces offer bisexual Christians the opportunity to engage with their faith in a way that affirms their sexuality, allowing for a more fluid and personalised expression of both their religious and sexual identities. Despite BiCon, there is a lack of permanent bisexual spaces that exist, particularly for those who identify as Christian. In religious contexts where heterosexuality and binary norm identities are often upheld, bisexual individuals are left to navigate a complex intersection of faith and sexuality. Hence, I contend that it is crucial to listen to the voices of bisexual individuals when they express both their preferences for shaping their own spaces, and the conditions that are essential to create thriving bisexual communities. These voices speak to the need for inclusive and permanent spaces that honour both their sexual and spiritual identities, fostering environments where they can authentically live out both aspects of their lives³⁰.

³⁰ At this stage, I believe it is important to reflect upon the fact that whilst this argument has still been under consideration, I am not seeking to add to the complex discourse surrounding 'space vs. place'. In the introduction to this chapter, I explored the significance of amplifying the voices of the participants and reflecting the language that they prefer to use; I argue that through a nuanced and relevant understanding of the 'space vs. place' argument, I will be able to successfully elevate their thoughts and opinions in a richer and more detailed manner.

5.4 Formatting and sharing data with a wider audience: potential impacts

When undertaking critical analysis of the research data, I began to develop a plan for how the participants' ideas and suggestions could be built into a pastoral policy or guidance document. This document, in whatever format it might take, would aim to provide Church of England communities with supportive measures that could be implemented to enable bisexual-specific support at a grassroots level. Appendix K of this thesis provides a one-page guidance sheet for CofE clergy, personnel, and congregants, outlining the ways in which churches can develop their spaces in order to champion bisexual inclusivity; these suggestions are crafted by the experiences and opinions of the participant groups of this research. However, I am significantly aware of the following factors:

1. Throughout this research study, I have consistently argued that bisexual visibility and support are critical due to the unique issues that bisexual Christians face. Considering this, would a 'one size fits all' guidance document be truly beneficial for this community? Would it truly reflect the experiences of the participants and the wider bisexual Christian world?
2. As of the end of 2023, the CofE has taken groundbreaking steps in agreeing to bless same-gender partnerships, however, same-gender marriages are still not possible within the institution. I would argue that at this time, the use of a document outlining bisexual inclusivity may as such, be ignored.

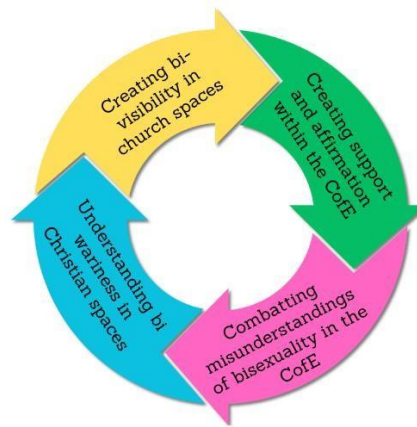
Despite this, I argue that through providing a guidance document for CofE communities, ground is being created for how these communities and spaces can consider incorporating active bisexual inclusion into their activities and worship. Alongside this plan, I was also conscious that the data presentation for this particular chapter would have to take on a more detailed and analytical format. Therefore, when pinpointing the key ideas that would form the basis of my document, I created a visual

aid in the form of a cyclical diagram. My diagram was ultimately shaped in this way for the following reasons:

1. Through the creation of a cyclical diagram, my aim was to illustrate the interconnectedness of the participants' ideas, and consequently, the ways in which the Church can support the bisexual community. This approach highlights how these ideas can converge and intersect, forming a robust foundation for effecting change.
2. A cyclical diagram shows that these ideas are susceptible to the cycle of change, and can continue to adapt, grow, and improve.
3. I would contend that employing a linear diagram, to consider another example, would have implied a sequential progression with a beginning and an end, potentially imposing a hierarchy or ranking on the suggested ideas. Instead, by utilising a cyclical shape, I aimed to emphasise the interconnectedness and ongoing nature of the ideas posed.

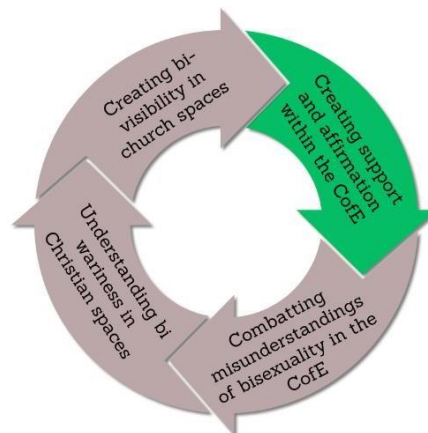
In addition to the concise guidance document derived from the data gathered for this thesis, I firmly believe that interpreting and sharing this data through the cyclical nature of this diagram will underscore the potential impacts that this data holds in catalysing change for the bisexual Christian community. Therefore, for the aforementioned reasons, and to facilitate navigational ease, this chapter will be divided into four key elements. It is important to reiterate that the significance and necessity of establishing a space specifically for bisexual individuals in the Church, in any feasible format, cannot be overstated. Regardless of their role within Church life, it is hoped that readers will acknowledge the challenges faced by these individuals and will be able to contemplate actionable steps to foster improvement.

Figure 10: The cyclical nature of creating an ideal bisexual Christian space in the CofE



5.5 Creating a supportive and affirming environment

Figure 11: The cyclical nature of ideal space: creating support and affirmation



BC001: ‘I think the majority of support I personally received as a queer Christian has been from external sources’

‘Have I actively seen a church in my lifetime host a group for queer people? No. Have I seen anyone step up and say “yes, I am happy to mentor or chat to anyone in this space”? No’.

‘I don’t think anyone would normally access that kind of level of support and discussion. Nor do I think they would feel it was appropriate to offer to their congregation’ – *excerpts from Katie’s interview* (lines 210; 214 – 15; 217 – 219, p. 7)

The above excerpts are drawn from the interview with Katie, and I believe they reflect her overarching sentiment effectively; providing support for LGBT+ people in the CofE is not normalised, which leads to a sense of disaffirmation and a lack of support amongst congregants. When speaking of support and affirmation, it is essential to clarify our definitions. To support someone or something is to provide comfort, approval, or encouragement. It is to be concerned for the needs, successes, or feelings of the thing (be it a group or idea) or individual upon which support is being bestowed. Affirming someone or something similarly involves providing encouragement and instilling a sense of value or declaring one’s support.

5.5.1 Affirmation in Christianity

In a Christian context, affirmation holds significant importance, encompassing faith, belief, and practices. For instance, the Apostles’ and Nicene Creeds serve as common affirmations of faith within Christian worship, be it an affirmation of God as the Creator, or that in Jesus’ immaculate conception, ‘God himself made a new beginning in the history of his Creation by coming in person and becoming part of that history’ (Cranfield, 2004, p. 30). On an individual level, affirmation may involve expressing one’s personal belief in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, often through public declarations such as baptism and confirmation. Personal or public affirmations may be a way in which one is able to affirm their ‘religious belonging’ and identity (Wilson, 1994, p. 111). Within the context of churches and their communities, affirmation plays a crucial role. Through community engagement, fellowship prayer, counselling, and support groups, affirmation fosters an environment in which members feel spiritually nurtured, supported, and valued.

5.5.1a LGBT+ affirmation in Christian communities

What does this mean for members of the LGBT+ community who wish to be affirmed by their Christian communities? For members of the LGBT+ community seeking this affirmation, the landscape can be complex. Attitudes vary regarding whether LGBT+ worshippers feel affirmed within their church spaces. Barnes (2013, p. 1409) proposes that ‘findings suggest the tendency for clergy to promote welcoming church spaces, but to be reticent about affirming homosexuality as an acceptable lifestyle’. This hesitancy may stem from concerns about potentially alienating other members of the congregation, leading to a cycle of acceptance and non-acceptance. It could be argued that this reticence stems from heteronormative ideals within the Christian faith, which can make it difficult for religious communities to fully accept or affirm non-heterosexual identities. Clergy may feel pressured to uphold traditional beliefs about marriage, family, and sexual identity, which are often framed around heterosexual norms. Furthermore, whilst some churches may privately accept LGBT+ lifestyles and relationships, they may not openly vocalise this stance. Other churches, in further contrast, may be unequivocally unaffirming. For some LGBT+ Christians, who may be a part of such congregations, or have interacted with them, ‘the negative effects of homonegativity and stigma from churches may cause some to withdraw from otherwise potentially positive networks and undermine overall health and wellbeing’ (White *et al*, 2020, p. 1192).

However, it is important to recognise that these attitudes do not offer a complete depiction of the relationship between LGBT+ Christians and church affirmation, as some LGBT+ Christians feel that their identity is positively affirmed by Christian communities. Formby’s (2017, p. 50) research sheds light upon Christians who feel positively affirmed and accepted by their church communities. In a survey response, one such participant stated that they are ‘a member of the Religious Society of Friends, who have a firm commitment to equality and have bolstered my sense of worth within a faith context

and provided a ‘sub’ LGBT community away from the pubs, clubs, and the scene’. Another participant is particularly interesting in relation to this research; after having concerns about coming out in the CofE, this survey participant ‘actually went on a Catholic retreat (run by Jesuits) which was a very positive experience and aided my ‘coming out’’ (p. 50). For some LGBT+ Christians, this Christian affirmation came from within themselves, or collectively in small groups. Sumerau (2017, p. 5) provides an example of an LGBT-affirming Christian support group, where ‘gay Christian men [...] taught one another emotional strategies for dispelling guilt, shame, and fear, and redefining “Godly” sexuality’. Including the perspectives of the study participants gives a lived reality perspective on issues that would otherwise only be theoretical, through engaging with their faith in ways that reflect personal experiences and collective support, through finding affirmation in a faith community that values equality, alongside seeking spiritual growth through retreat. Additionally, LGBT+-affirming support groups provide spaces for individuals to redefine their spirituality, allowing for flexible, individualised expressions of faith that go beyond institutional teachings.

5.5.1b Bisexual affirmation in Christian communities

There is a noticeable scarcity of research that specifically addresses bisexual affirmation within Christian churches. Indeed, it is often common that studies focusing on Christian/LGBT+ affirmation will mention bisexuality in their abstracts, but then fail to elaborate upon the unique experiences of bisexuals (Smith and Horne, 2007; Minnix, 2018; Finke, 2020). Whilst Yip and Gross’s (2010) French and British research study does not solely focus on bisexuality, it does make specific reference to certain bisexual participants, and how they feel affirmed within their Christian faith. For example, Mike, an Anglican, stated that through personal prayer and reading the Bible, he was able to feel affirmed and strengthen his faith, which he argues is particularly important if you are worshipping in a church that ‘says it’s not OK to be gay or bisexual’ (p. 50). Janice, another Anglican participant, moved towards

self-affirmation within her church when she began to understand her religious institution is ‘silly’ on such matters. Janice notes the many happy lesbian and gay Christians she sees within the church community; whilst she does not refer to any other bisexual Christians, it is positive to perceive that she can build affirmation through other LGBT+ Christians (p. 46).

Yip and Gross’s (2010, p. 53) study also pays attention to one particularly negative bisexual experience. Whilst John, a Catholic, does not necessarily speak of affirmation within his church, he does argue for keeping his faith and sexual identities separate, due to a lack of confidence and understanding from his Christian community. Later in this chapter, we will examine how the bisexual Christian participants within this research study either do not *seek* affirmation, due to keeping their faith and sexual identities separate, or choose to keep their identities separate due to a *lack of* affirmation.

In order to provide a rich and detailed analysis of the bisexual and *LLF* participant’s attitudes towards support and affirmation within the CofE, this sub-theme will be examined from three different perspectives:

1. Support and affirmation are not present within the Church of England.
2. Support and affirmation are, or are somewhat, present within the Church of England.
3. Affirmation is not needed within the Church of England.

5.5.2 Support and affirmation are not present within the Church of England

This initial perspective will enable us to delve deeper into the quotations from Katie presented at the beginning of this section, in addition to insights from another participant, Jessica. Both

participants contend that affirmation is lacking not only within the broader organisational framework of the Church, but also at a more grassroots level within congregations.

5.5.2a Welcoming, but not affirming

We will begin with Jessica's perspective, which serves as a foundation for exploring the notion of churches being welcoming, without necessarily being affirming. Jessica contends that:

BC005: 'It's infuriating sometimes because I would love for the Church of England, as an institution, because they have so much power as well, like if they came out and they were like, we sort of, affirm same gender marriages, we affirm bisexual people, it would be such a powerful thing, and they have [...] the capacity to do that, and they like actively choose not to, and so I take kind of quite a lot, I take that personally you know' (lines 131 – 136, p. 4).

The CofE wields considerable power and influence as the established church of its nation and boasts the largest congregation amongst Christian denominations in England. Therefore, it is understandable that LGBT+ congregants may feel disappointed to observe other Christian denominations moving towards or endorsing same-gender marriage, whilst the CofE remains behind. By persisting in following its current path, the Church is failing to align with the support that some of its members may seek to provide. Jessica's statement highlights the Church's heteronormative stance. The Church's reluctance to endorse same-gender marriage, despite other Christian denominations moving forward in this area, reflects the felt influence of heteronormative values that uphold heterosexuality as the default and morally acceptable sexual orientation. By not aligning with the growing support for LGBT+ rights among some congregants, the Church reinforces a framework where non-heterosexual identities are excluded. This hesitancy to affirm same-gender relationships signals that the institution values conformity to heteronormative ideals over the needs and identities of LGBT+ members.

Jessica also refers to the Church having a ‘capacity’ to make bold decisions to support the LGBT+ community. In its current state, it could be argued that the CofE seems to have the capacity to welcome LGBT+ individuals, so why not affirm them? This encourages a consideration of the concept of welcoming, but not affirming, one which exists within churches and denominations around the world. Jennings (2017, p. 217), in his research into the Pentecostal-Charismatic Christian community in Australia, quotes a participant who states that the entire church structure is set up to be ‘heterocentric, so when you come out you have no choice but to leave because there really is no self-respect in staying inside a community that holds up a banner saying “welcome home” while simultaneously rejecting your very presence by silence’. Whilst these churches may welcome LGBT+ worshippers, activities such as ‘relationship seminars, Valentine’s Day, women’s conferences, men’s conferences’ (p. 217) continue to be framed through a heterocentric lens. Although these events are imbued with positive sentiments, the underlying assumption that they primarily cater to heterosexual relationships reinforces the idea that LGBT+ lifestyles are not fully affirmed or recognised within the church. This highlights how heterocentrism shapes the structures and practices of these communities, ultimately marginalising non-heterosexual identities.

So why might it be the case that churches struggle to both welcome and affirm their LGBT+ congregants? What barriers do these institutions face? Sherwood’s (2017a) work examines the complexities of church dynamics and the challenges they face in affirming congregants. Whilst his study does not focus on the LGBT+ community, it illustrates the broader struggle that many churches encounter when attempting to reconcile their beliefs with the desire to welcome and affirm all worshippers. ‘As soon as the church tried to find a way to be “welcoming and affirming” of all Christians it had to make decisions about what it meant to be a Baptist church in terms of doctrine and practice, including the issue of baptism’ (2017a, p. 7). Sherwood’s church was willing to welcome non-

Baptists into its fold, but the concept of affirmation then led the church to question what it means to be a Baptist, and to worship fully within a Baptist church. For the LGBT+ community, whilst many may be welcomed into church environments, churches may not feel that they can then affirm LGBT+ lifestyles, due to religious doctrine, a fear of change, congregational demographics, or even cultural isolation. Returning to the Pentecostal-Charismatic Christian church, Jennings' (2017, pp. 227) participants argued that pastors 'empathised with the LGBTQ people in their congregations', but could not then allow them to volunteer in leadership roles. Many acknowledged that this made it difficult for LGBT+ congregants to feel accepted and that ultimately, by not affirming, the churches could not truly argue themselves to be welcoming:

'Former pastor GQ expressed consternation at the implications of this phrase. "Welcomed but not affirmed. So, we love you, we welcome you into our presence, but we don't affirm your lifestyle. So, that's— that, to me, is a real concern, because it's—it's almost like with one hand you're shaking them by the hand and with the other hand you're slapping them in the face"' (p. 232).

The struggle churches face in both welcoming and affirming their LGBT+ congregants is rooted in heteronormative ideals, which create barriers to the full inclusion of LGBT+ individuals. Churches may be willing to welcome LGBT+ people into their communities, but affirming their identities often conflicts with traditional beliefs and doctrinal positions on sexuality, leading to a cycle of partial acceptance but no full recognition. This is particularly evident when churches empathise with LGBT+ congregants but cannot grant them leadership roles or full participation (as shown in Jennings' study), demonstrating how an institutionalised heteronormative framework limits how fully LGBT+ individuals can integrate into church life.

In response to this partial acceptance, many LGBT+ Christians turn to personal, everyday

religious practices that allow them to reconcile their faith with their identities beyond the constraints of formal doctrine. These lived expressions of faith often emerge in affirming communities – whether through house churches, online spaces, or informal gatherings – where individuals collectively reimagine what faithful living can look like. In this way, heteronormativity within formal church structures not only reinforces exclusion but also restricts the flourishing of lived religion, particularly when LGBT+ individuals are unable to fully live out their spirituality in ways that affirm both their sexual identity and their faith.

Drawing on Lefebvre's (1991) concept of the production of space, these alternative religious environments can be understood as more than just new venues for worship; they are actively produced through social, symbolic, and theological practices. Such spaces emerge when individuals and communities engage in acts of resistance, reinterpret doctrine, and build inclusive liturgies that centre marginalised voices. These spaces can reflect not only a desire for inclusion but an active participation in reshaping the geography of religious life, challenging dominant spatial arrangements and allowing for new forms of spiritual belonging that are more expansive, affirming, and just.

5.5.2b Welcome and affirmation in the Church of England

Let us return to Jessica's considerations of capacity, and the frustration she feels over the Church's lack of willing to welcome and affirm. It should be noted that Jessica was interviewed in early 2022, and at this point, the Church had not made any further progress towards affirmation of the LGBT+ community since the release of *LLF*. As a researcher, I offered solidarity with Jessica regarding the, at the time, 'infuriating' attitudes of the Church. However, it could now be argued that welcome and affirmation are not completely absent from the CofE. In early 2023, a motion was passed which stated priests in the Church could bless the civil marriages of same-gender couples, and that forthcoming

reviews would be undertaken surrounding clergy entering same-gender civil marriages, and celibacy rules for clergy in same-gender relationships. The Archbishops of Canterbury and York also stated that “for the first time, the CofE will publicly, unreservedly, and joyfully welcome same-sex couples in church” (Sherwood, 2023). Although this comment could certainly spark joy in the hearts of many, bisexuals are still yet to see more active support from the Church institution – this will be discussed in more detail in the following section. 2023 also saw the CofE publish a follow-up document to its *LLF* publication, where Bishops apologised for the treatment of LGBT+ people and declared that better understandings of bisexuality were needed, stating ‘we affirm, publicly and unequivocally, that LGBTQI+ people are welcome and valued: we are all children of God’ (p. 2). The Bishops specified that they were seeking ‘ways of affirming same-sex couples – inside and outside the church – while committing ourselves to respecting the disagreement, in conscience, of those who believe this compromises the Church’s inherited tradition and teaching’ (p. 4).

Let us return to Jessica’s final point: ‘they like actively choose not to, [...] I take that personally you know’ (BC005, line 136, p. 4). Is it surprising that Jessica made this remark, at a time when the Church had yet to announce its stance on same-gender blessings, or issue apologies for past mistreatment? Even now, whilst the Church may still welcome bisexual individuals into its congregations, what active action has it taken to affirm them beyond a vague offer to learn more about the community? Can the Church genuinely affirm bisexuals without addressing the absence of an apology for the language used in Section 5.8 of *Issues*? Jessica’s statement prompts a profound reflection on how the Church can progress from mere welcome to genuine affirmation, a task that will require more than just simple statements.

5.5.2c A lack of affirmation in local church communities

Katie's quotations at the beginning of this chapter gave an insight into the lack of normalisation surrounding LGBT+ support and affirmation within the CofE. Katie, who through local worship in her community, university worship, and her employment, had experienced a breadth of churches within the CofE, and argues:

BC001: 'Have I actively seen a church in my lifetime host a group for queer people? No. Have I seen anyone step up and say "yes, I'm happy to mentor or chat to anyone in this space?" No [...] I don't think anyone normally would access that kind of level of support and discussion. Nor do I think they would feel it was appropriate to offer to their congregation' (lines 214 – 219, p. 7)

Katie's choice of the word 'appropriate' is particularly interesting here. Why might it be that churches do not find it appropriate to offer support to LGBT+ congregants? Young Jr. (2022, p. 172) argues that even if some pastors may 'personally affirm LGBQ people, they may feel pressure from their denominations or parishioners to keep this perspective to themselves'. This highlights how churches are not neutral spaces but are socially produced, as Lefebvre (1991, p. 26, p. 38) might argue, shaped by institutional ideologies, including heteronormative values. The threat of alienating conservative worshippers or facing community backlash can pressure clergy to conform to these dominant norms, suppressing their personal affirmations of LGBT+ individuals. This dynamic echoes Massey's (2005, p. 122) concept of space as a site of competing narratives or 'social contestation', where the church space becomes a site of tension between progressive and conservative forces, each vying for control over the interpretation of faith and sexuality. Such pressure is not a new phenomenon: in 1969, Father Nidorf, a Roman Catholic priest, founded Dignity, a gay fellowship group that reimagined religious practice to reflect the lived experiences of LGBT+ people. The group offered a space where faith and sexuality could coexist, including group therapy, theological discussions, and

Holy Mass, not simply accepting religious doctrine but actively reshaping it. Despite institutional resistance, as Gershon (2021) notes, Dignity became a strategic space where LGBT+ Catholics could re-claim their spiritual identities, challenging both church doctrine and heteronormative assumptions. This ‘tactic[al] resistance’, to borrow from de Certeau (1984, p. 37), reveals how individuals within the church space actively negotiate, subvert, and reconfigure institutional powers to create a meaningful, personalised experience of faith.

5.5.2d Local support in the Church of England

It would not be accurate to claim that no support at all is offered to LGBT+ Christians within the CofE. However, it is possible that Katie was either unaware of, or unable to, access the support networks that exist on local or national levels, and her comment may be specifically referring to the absence of support tailored to bisexual individuals. Whilst organisations supporting LGBT+ Anglicans do exist, it is important to note that these groups are not run by the CofE, and there is little indication that they provide specific resources for bisexuals, or if they do, it is not prominently featured on their websites. This absence may push spaces of acceptance and support for bisexuals outside the institution, potentially making such spaces more difficult to find.

As noted above, in Lefebvre’s (1991 p. 26, p. 38) terms, the church can be seen as a socially produced space where the prevailing heteronormative structures shape the accessibility and visibility of support networks. Whilst broader ecumenical LGBT+-affirming organisations are available for bisexual Christians to engage with, the lack of tailored bisexual support within the CofE reflects how dominant institutional forces render bisexuality invisible within both language and practice. LLF003’s comment surrounding ‘fights over language [...] language that sort of normalised, even mutually described experiences [which] was problematic, precisely because it didn’t problematise’ (lines 179 –

182, p. 6) within the *LLF* discussions underscores this issue. The generic use of language around LGBT+ identities fails to address the specific experiences of bisexual individuals, reinforcing the erasure of bisexuality. By not problematising the unique challenges of bisexuality, the Church's approach reflects a broader heteronormative framework, which often subsumes bisexuality under broader lesbian and gay categories – As Massey (2005, p. 123) states, 'institutions, through their practices, impose certain configurations of space that privilege particular ways of being, thereby excluding or marginalising other possibilities'. This erasure leaves bisexual individuals without the space to voice their distinct needs, making it increasingly difficult for them to seek recognition and support within church contexts.

The lack of specific recognition is further emphasised by *LLF001*, who expressed uncertainty about the existence of bi-specific support networks: 'maybe the fact I don't know is significant' (line 261, p. 8). This remark signals the invisibility of bisexual experiences within the CofE, suggesting that such networks, if they exist, are not widely known or acknowledged within the Church community. In de Certeau's (1984) terms, this could also be understood as a 'tactical' erasure: whilst there are institutional 'strategies' that define and maintain the heteronormative practices of the CofE, the lack of bi-specific support creates a space where bisexual Christians are forced to navigate a church environment that does not adequately reflect their needs. The absence of bi-specific support networks highlights the Church's adherence to a monosexual, heteronormative lens, which continues to shape both doctrine and lived experience, making bisexual Christians feel marginalised and disconnected from meaningful inclusion within the CofE.

LLF005, whilst not quoted directly here, also expressed uncertainty about whether bisexual-specific support groups existed, further underscoring the gaps in visibility and acknowledgment. They

pointed out that the confirmation of such spaces would ideally have to come from a bisexual person, yet also emphasised the importance of creating an environment where bisexuals can confidently engage with these support networks. LLF005's concern that bisexuals might not feel affirmed, even in spaces where they are welcomed, reflects the critical distinction between being *welcomed* and being *affirmed*. The Church may allow bisexual individuals to occupy its spaces, but without a clear commitment to affirming their identity, this welcome becomes hollow. As LLF005 suggests, the environment within the Church needs to be one where bisexuals can approach these groups not just with a sense of acceptance, but with confidence that their identities and experiences will be truly understood and respected. This mirrors the broader challenge within the Church to move beyond surface-level inclusion into deep, transformative affirmation that recognises and values the specific experiences of all its members.

Whilst their comments may not convey the same emotional weight as those of the bisexual participants, their significance lies in the fact that these concerns come from within the Church itself – those who are deeply embedded in academic, clerical, and institutional life. I argue that this lack of awareness and understanding about bisexual-specific needs reflects a broader institutional understanding of bisexuality to challenge heteronormative structures. This lack of understanding, in turn, perpetuates the marginalisation of bisexual people, preventing them from feeling fully included or affirmed within the Church. The question of whether those deeply interwoven in Church life could be more attuned to the needs of bisexual congregants underscores the responsibility of church leaders and decision-makers to actively educate themselves and create policies and spaces that affirm all sexual identities. Ultimately, these comments highlight the urgent need for bisexual-specific support networks within the CofE. In a Church that often prides itself on being welcoming, it is crucial that the welcoming environment extends beyond simply making room for bisexuals to enter its spaces. It must actively

address the structural barriers that exist, including the persistent effects of heteronormativity, and work towards creating spaces where bisexuals are not only welcomed but truly affirmed. This requires not just a shift in language, but a fundamental rethinking of how the Church approaches inclusion, one that is intentional about understanding and responding to the lived experiences of bisexual individuals. Without this, bisexuals within the CofE will continue to face the painful reality of being tolerated, but not fully accepted, within the body of the Church.

5.5.3 Support and affirmation are, or are somewhat, present within the Church of England

Throughout the interview process, multiple bisexual Christian participants argued that support and affirmation are somewhat present within the CofE. I use the term ‘somewhat’ here, as all participants who believed that there was some level of affirmation did not believe that it was present within the structural foundations, or ‘upper echelons’ of the Church, but instead believed that support and affirmation were offered to them in the church communities from friends, allies, or priests. This is not an uncommon mindset within Christian communities. In their study on the United Methodist Church, Gilliland and Krull (2022, p. 480) noted how ‘in February 2019, the United Methodist Church (UMC) voted by a narrow margin to affirm and strengthen the denomination’s existing stance that homosexuality is “incompatible with Christian teaching”’. However, despite this declaration of incompatibility from the UMC itself, many clergy did not let this stop them from openly affirming LGBT+ people. In this particular study, ‘some clergy drew on the authority of God [...] to explicitly affirm that LGBTQ people are created by God’ (p. 495), using theological grounding to argue that this radical inclusion is exactly what God would do. Some clergy took further steps to affirm the LGBT+ community by encouraging leadership and involvement in church roles – the complete opposite of what the wider UMC deemed to be acceptable.

Lauren, Katie, Leah, and Danielle are all participants who stated that they did not, at the time of interviewing, feel affirmed by the wider CofE. We have already gained an insight into Katie's views of Church affirmation in the previous section, but she provides more detail here as to situations where she has felt affirmed within the wider context of the Church. All participants argued that they did not feel support or affirmation were offered to them at an institutional level. However, to return to the arguments of Gilliland and Krull (2020), even if a wider church organisation does not share complete messages of affirmation, it does not mean that everyone within that organisation adopts the same approach.

5.5.3a Individualised support in Church communities

Lauren, Katie, and Danielle all express that the support and affirmation they have received is individualised:

BC004: 'I think there's support from particular individuals who are Christians, but I don't think there is... I don't think there's any support really, in the model of the Church of England' - *Lauren* (lines 74 – 76, p. 3)

BC001: 'In terms of whether I feel affirmed in those spaces and whether I sought out affirmation in those spaces, I think affirmation has certainly come from individual Christians, people who I've known on a personal level for a long time. But I would not say the Church as a whole has been affirming, if that makes sense' – *Katie* (lines 244 – 247, p. 8)

BC008: 'At an individual level there's so many people I've met in the Church, who are just absolutely amazing, who have provided so much support over the years, and that's comes from straight people and queer people' – *Danielle* (lines 114 – 117, p. 5)

No participant explicitly stated who provided the individual support they received, whether it was priests, fellow congregants, or worship leaders. However, what can be inferred is that these individuals were trusted figures with whom the participants felt they could authentically express

themselves. Whether clergy, family, or community members, these are individuals who might not be fully aware of the impact their affirmation and support have had, but in a church where bisexual individuals are not yet fully affirmed, this support remains crucial. According to Lefebvre's (1991, p. 26, p. 38), these moments of affirmation can be understood as acts of resistance within a socially produced church space that is largely governed by heteronormative values. Whilst such support may occur on a more personal, informal level, it remains significant in challenging the dominant institutional forces within the CofE that do not recognise bisexuality as a valid expression of sexual identity.

Dewey et al. (2014, p. 299) argue that many conservative religious traditions encourage the belief that 'same-sex intimacy [is] 'sinful'', and for LGBT+ worshippers, such homonegative messages can be isolating and psychologically harmful. This is an expression of the Church's heteronormative framework, where alternative sexualities are marginalised. However, affirming clergy and community members are, in Massey's (2005, p. 157 – *see below*) framework, actively reshaping the church space by creating relational spaces that challenge these dominant narratives. By providing support, even unknowingly, they contribute to a relational 'multiplicity' of stories within the Church, where LGBT+ individuals can begin to carve out a more inclusive, authentic experience of faith. In this sense, these spaces of support are not neutral but are relationally produced, reflecting the ongoing contestation of power between institutional heteronormativity and the lived experiences of bisexual Christians. Rodriguez and Oullette (2000, p. 335) highlight examples of 'gay-positive churches' in the United States, where clergy work to integrate religious and sexual identities. These faith communities, like Dignity and Good News, provide spaces where queer individuals can embrace both their sexuality and spirituality without having to compromise or compartmentalise their identity. These 'gay-positive' churches actively encourage an integrated sense of self, where both sexual and religious identities can coexist harmoniously. This concept of integration can be applied to affirming clergy within the CofE

who create space for LGBT+ individuals to live authentically. Whilst not all clergy or communities within the CofE may be inclusive, those that are provide a counter-narrative within the Church's heteronormative structure, reshaping the very nature of the space and how individuals experience it.

As Dewey et al. (2014, p. 301) assert, clergy are in a unique position to impact individuals' lives, both at the personal and social group level. These affirming practices, whether explicitly acknowledged by participants or not, help individuals to practice religion in ways that are meaningful and deeply personal. By fostering inclusive worship services and offering an affirming theology, clergy can help shift the focus from institutional doctrine that marginalises bisexual identities toward a more inclusive and embodied faith experience. In this way, clergy play a critical role in reshaping the space of the church to be one that better reflects the lived realities of bisexual Christians, offering a sanctuary where they can integrate their faith and sexuality without fear of rejection.

5.5.3b Allyship

McQueeney (2009, p. 152) emphasises the idea of how in more conservative Christian churches, lesbians, gays, and 'straight-but-affirming allies' find ways to 'mobilise[d] Christian discourse', turning negative attitudes towards homosexuality around in order to normalise language surrounding this community. There is a lack of research surrounding how heterosexuals can support LGBT+ individuals in Christian communities, but McQueeney's study shines a light on this branch of individualised support. As we have seen, Danielle states that the individual support she has received in her Christian community has come from not just fellow members of the LGBT+ community, but also from heterosexual Christians. Whilst Danielle did not elaborate on whether her heterosexual counterparts were able to support and affirm her specifically as a bisexual, or just as queer person, it is positive to see recognition of the requirement of support and affirmation for queer Christians from the

heterosexual Christian community.

From the above study, we will focus on the term ‘allies’. Allies are individuals who actively support marginalised groups. During the period of response that followed the publication of *LLF*, Danielle noted many allies appearing on social media, sharing their support of the LGBT+ community. Through their digital modicums of support, it became obvious to Danielle that even if the wider Church was not showing full affirmation, affirmation existed within many smaller corners of the CofE:

BC008: ‘I know that there is a, now know that there is a network of allies working in the Church and I mean, even with the *Living in Love and Faith* process, seeing people who I didn't know were allies tweeting about it or sharing things on social media or preaching about it, and I've seen that and I've realised that there were more, probably more allies than I thought that were in the Church...’ (lines 179 – 183, p. 7)

In Christian spaces that are unaffirming, to greater and lesser degrees, LGBT+ allies can promote ‘safe and inclusive [...] communities’ through ‘privilege and power [...], strength and resilience’ (Cumming-Potvin, 2022, p. 1). Be it through active and open affirmations of welcome and solidarity within physical church spaces, or as noted in Danielle’s example, virtual statements of support for the LGBT+ community, allyship allows those who are ‘affirming in their hearts and want to do more in action to demonstrate that support’ (Student Christian Movement, 2023, p. 3) to be a champion for LGBT+ Christians in spaces where they may not be, or may only be vaguely, championed by their institution. The bisexual community in particular needs allies, both in Christian spaces and wider society. Baxter-Williams (2016, p. 275) argues that in an inherently biphobic society, allies play a ‘key role’ in supporting bisexuality’s struggle; allies ‘have access to resources and assets at platforms frequently denied to bisexual people, and they have voices that are harder to ignore and more opportunities to use those voices’.

Allies play a crucial role in challenging heteronormativity within Christian spaces by using their privilege, visibility, and influence to disrupt the assumption that heterosexuality is the default or ideal mode of existence. In Lefebvre's (1991, p. 38) framework, the 'actions of social groups' – such as allies – are actively involved in the 'social production of space', reshaping the church environment by inserting practices and new narratives that challenge exclusionary ideologies. Through vocal and visible affirmations of bisexuality and LGBT+ identities, whether in sermons, church discussions, or policy advocacy, they engage in practices that alter the very nature of the space itself. By actively questioning and reshaping the language, traditions, and expectations that reinforce heteronormativity, allies help dismantle the dominant structures within the church, making room for diverse identities to be recognised and valued. This reconfiguration of space is not only institutional but also relational, as per Massey's (2005, p. 121) notion of space as a 'simultaneous multiplicity of stories'. Allies, by advocating for LGBT+ inclusion, help create spaces where bisexual Christians are not isolated within a singular, exclusionary narrative but are instead welcomed into a multiplicity of experiences. These spaces are relationally produced, created through dialogue, shared affirmations, and the active participation of individuals who offer alternative views to the heteronormative assumptions that often dominate religious spaces. Allies create environments where bisexual Christians, and LGBT+ individuals in general, can embody their faith and sexuality authentically. This relational space provides room for difference to exist without fear of judgment or exclusion, affirming the validity of diverse sexual identities within faith communities.

Furthermore, de Certeau's (1984, pp. 37 - 38) concept of tactics and strategies can help us understand the role of allies as they engage with and reshape church spaces. Whilst the institutional strategies of the Church, often influenced by conservative theological views, may uphold heteronormative structures, allies employ tactics to subvert or challenge these structures. These

tactics might involve advocating for inclusive liturgies, offering pastoral care that affirms bisexuality, or creating informal networks of support, whether within physical church spaces or online, as highlighted in Danielle's comment. These acts, while sometimes small or informal, are critical in providing bisexual individuals with the space to authentically express their faith and sexuality. Through these tactical interventions, allies disrupt the hegemonic institutional norms, creating a more inclusive and affirming space for LGBT+ Christians.

In this way, allies contribute to the ongoing reproduction and transformation of religious spaces, making them more inclusive, supportive, and affirming. Their actions help bridge the gap between institutional hesitation, rooted in traditional heteronormative frameworks, and the urgent need for faith communities that actively celebrate and include bisexual and LGBT+ Christians in meaningful ways.

5.5.3c Individualised support for bisexuality?

When considering the above research and comments from the bisexual participants, we should now consider; much of the individualised support shown in other research studies is focused on gay and lesbian experiences. But what does this mean for bisexuals? McQueeney (2009, pp. 169 – 70) notes this lack of bisexual inclusion in her study. Whilst the two affirming churches focused on were committed to inclusion, 'being inclusive, as a group ideal, was difficult if not impossible to achieve because church members' construction and performance of good Christian identities was enmeshed in race, class, gender, and sexual meanings and hierarchies in the church and society'. Again, we face this issue of binaries; by defining sexuality in one of two ways, the experiences of bisexuals are diminished and forgotten. This does not mean that bisexuals are not receiving individual support within their Christian communities – we can see this from the experiences of the participants in this study.

Therefore, we should query: do individuals within CofE communities feel confident giving support to bisexuals? Is there enough understanding of bisexuality for explicit support and affirmation? Should education be offered ‘at the bottom’ to those in church spaces in order to encourage bisexual support and affirmation within communities, or should education be mandated at the top of the institutional structure, so those ‘at the top’ can lead by example and encourage bisexual support within both CofE communities and the wider Church?

5.5.3d Home church vs. wider Church

Leah elaborates further on the individualised support and affirmation she has received within the CofE:

BC006: ‘I’m much more open about my sexuality in the wider Church than I am within my actual church, like it’s kind of easier to kind of, talk about it and seek affirmation with Christians that you don’t sort of see on a weekly basis, but it would be nice to have both’³¹ (lines 136 – 138, p. 5)

Leah expresses that she finds it more comfortable to seek support and affirmation from individual Christians within the broader Church community instead of her home church, where she has not disclosed her bisexuality. Various factors may play a role in this dynamic. During her interview, Leah revealed that she had not yet been involved in a romantic relationship with a woman, which occasionally caused her to question her sexuality. To those acquainted with Leah in her home church, they may have been aware of her relationship history, or engaged in discussions with her family, both of which might prompt unnecessary self-reflection and led her to feel hesitant about disclosing her

³¹ When commenting on the ‘wider Church’, Leah is particularly referring to Christian strangers she has interacted with online, or those she has met at Christian conferences and events.

bisexuality. Additionally, Leah mentioned in her interview that ‘my vicar doesn’t agree with same-sex marriage’ (BC007, line 54, p. 3), which could heighten her apprehension about openly expressing her identity and seeking support and validation within her home church.

It is not uncommon for bisexuals to feel uncomfortable in the coming out process. When coming out, bisexuals often face ‘several factors’ that are often ‘not taken into account in sexual identity development models and coming out narratives’ (McLean, 2007, p. 152). A lack of understanding of what bisexuality is often leads ‘outsiders’ to question the validity of bisexuality, referring to it as a phase, or confusing it with polyamory. In their journey of developing and understanding their sexual identity, bisexuals are ‘much more likely to experience as a final stage what they call ‘continued uncertainty’ – the continual questioning of the validity of one’s bisexual identity’ (p. 153). I would argue that this personal questioning is only exacerbated by the external lack of understanding that so many bisexuals face. Wandrey, Mosack, and Moore (2015, p. 205) state that bisexuals ‘face unique stigma associated with their specific sexual orientation’, ones that are particularly prevalent in church settings, where bisexuality is seen as promiscuous, or in need of healing, to quote the CofE in particular. In McLean’s (2007, p. 154) study, it was found that bisexuals were ‘selective’ about who they shared their sexual identity with, particularly with ‘parents, siblings, and some friends’. I would argue that coming out to individuals who are a part of our personal lives can be much harder than coming out to those who we do not really know. If friends and family are not understanding of the bisexual identity, or perhaps feel shocked, angry, or upset, the bisexual may not feel that they can simply ‘walk away’. Some bisexual women in Wandrey, Mosack, and Moore’s (2015, p. 209) study feared ‘potential rejections from their families if they were to participate in same-sex relationships’. In Leah’s case, she revealed in her interview that whilst her parents knew of her bisexuality, and she often felt that she could talk to them if she needed support, she was conscious of the fact that:

BC007: ‘Church and my family are very linked [...] things spread like wildfire, like if I told someone something then the whole church would know, my whole family would know, my extended family’ (lines 128; 153 – 155, pp. 5 – 6)

Leah’s tone when stating this suggested that this ‘spread’ of information in her home church would be a cause of anxiety or distress. In the wider Church, however, Leah may have felt more comfortable sharing her identity with those she does not know, or see on a regular basis, as they have no ‘grounds’ to question her identity. Leah also shared that she purposely sought out other LGBT+ Christians within the wider CoFE, therefore seeking a group who are more accepting of her bisexuality and could offer affirmation and support.

Leah’s experience highlights the pervasive influence of heteronormativity within the Church, where assumptions of heterosexuality make it more difficult for bisexual individuals to feel safe in openly expressing their identities. The fear of being questioned, misunderstood, or even having her identity invalidated within her home church reflects how heteronormative structures police sexual identity by making non-heterosexual orientations seem deviant or in need of justification. This reinforces bisexual invisibility and makes self-disclosure a risk rather than a step toward acceptance. However, Leah’s decision to seek out affirming spaces within the wider Church community provides an important example of lived religion: by intentionally engaging with other LGBT+ Christians, Leah is enacting a form of resistance against heteronormative exclusion and shaping her faith in a way that integrates her identity and beliefs. Her journey also underscores the difference between being welcomed and being affirmed; while she may not face overt rejection in her home church, the absence of clear affirmation leaves her seeking validation elsewhere. Ultimately, her experience highlights the necessity of active allyship, structural change, and intentional affirmation within the Church, so that bisexual individuals do not have to seek support outside their immediate faith communities but can

instead find it where they worship.

5.5.4 Affirmation is not needed within the Church of England

Finally, we should consider whether bisexual Christians in the Church of England feel that they need to seek affirmation from their congregations. I would argue that this is a question that only Christian bisexuals themselves can answer. I am aware that the bisexual participants in this study only represent a very small percentage of bisexual Christian views, therefore there will undoubtedly be a plethora of views from bisexuals as to whether they feel as if they need, or want, to be affirmed within their churches. In this particular instance, Lauren is an individual who does not feel that she needs to seek affirmation from the CofE. As a young person, Lauren sought affirmation for her sexual identity within the Church, but upon realising she was not going to receive it, stopped searching:

BC004: ‘When I was younger I was looking for the Church and the people in the Church to accept it and give me support, and then as I’ve grown older, I’ve kind of thought well I’m just not going to get that, so I’m not going to look for it [...] I feel like at that point [when she was aged 15/16], I was affirmed by God, and then the pushback that I received from future churches has kind of made me feel like I don’t need to, I don’t want to search for affirmation within a church, I have affirmation for myself. I’m not seeking for anyone else’s approval at this point’ (lines 91 – 94; 101 – 103, p. 4)

Seeking affirmation can often be a part of the coming out process, and ‘some scholars maintain that self-acceptance or self-affirmation is part of [the] coming out [process]’ (Guittar, 2013, p. 175). It could be argued that self-affirmation for LGBT+, particularly bisexual, Christians, plays a more important part in developing and understanding one’s sexual and religious identity, as studies have shown that large groups of individuals see ‘Christians as “antihomosexual”’, or that ‘religious involvement is associated with negative views towards gay and lesbian people’ (Murr, 2013, p. 350).

In instances such as this, LGBT+ Christians may feel the need to self-affirm as opposed to attempting to gain affirmation from a church environment that may not accept them. I would argue that this could particularly be the case for bisexuals, who are often highly misunderstood within Christian spaces, particularly the CofE.

There is limited research that focuses on how bisexual Christians practice self-affirmation within Christian spaces, particularly the CofE. Toft (2014, pp. 553 – 554) interviewed several Christians who ‘negotiated, constructed and enacted their faith against a backdrop of a denomination that may (or may not) be supportive towards their sexuality’. Through focusing on other aspects of bisexuality besides sex or following Jesus’ example of seeing ‘people as people’ (p. 558) as opposed to their gender specifically, Toft’s participants were able to reconceptualise their bisexuality, and ultimately self-affirm in a Church that does not fully understand the complexities of their identity. In Murr’s (2013) study of queer Christian women, she notes that for Christian women who were exposed to negative LGBT+ messages, whilst this led to a struggle of identity integration between their queerness and their Christianity, these women,

‘rather than dismissing the faith that was important to them, they searched the Bible, went to seminary, read theology, sought the advice of others, and prayed. They discovered that a more deliberate search of what it means to be Christian opened doors for them. They often progressed from shame and isolation to an internal assurance that they are loved and that God is pleased with them’ (Murr, 2013, p.368)

ultimately leading to self-affirmation. Some women then chose to seek out affirming congregations, but others did not.

Returning to Lauren’s statement at the beginning of this section (lines 91 – 94; 101 – 103, p.

4), we must consider: should more bisexual Christians, especially within the CofE, end their search for affirmation within Christian communities, and instead focus on self-affirming? Whilst this approach may be beneficial for certain bisexuals, others may believe that they can only attain self-affirmation through validation within Christian communities. It is important to recognise that both paths are valid choices. What the CofE should consider from this, however, is how and why its communities are encouraging some bisexual Christians to stop seeking affirmation within them: what attitudes are causing this? Why do some bisexuals feel as if they cannot be affirmed within Church communities, and therefore, how can these communities create environments in which bisexual Christians can successfully navigate their affirmation journeys? At its core, this issue reflects the deep-rooted heteronormativity within the CofE, leaving bisexual Christians feeling unseen or unacknowledged. When church communities fail to provide explicit affirmation, bisexual individuals may feel compelled to disengage, viewing self-affirmation as their only viable path. In Massey's (2005, p. 38) relational approach to space, we can understand this dynamic as a contest or 'conflict' over the meanings and experiences associated with religious belonging. The CofE, as an institution, produces a space where heterosexuality is normalised, and as a result, the relational dynamics within space are often shaped by these normative assumptions. For bisexual Christians, this relational space can become alienating, as their experiences of identity, love, and faith do not align with the dominant heteronormative narrative. As Massey argues, space is always a product of relational dynamics, of competing narratives and different social forces. In this case, the narrative of heteronormativity in the CofE actively marginalises bisexual identities. When bisexuals feel excluded, they may seek affirmation in alternative spaces, or simply within the safe space of themselves.

5.5.5 How do we move forward?

A want or need for support and affirmation will be different for every bisexual Christian in the

CofE. As we have seen in the voices of the bisexual participants, some feel an anger at the lack of support and affirmation that they are denied from the institutional Church as bisexual Christians; others feel as if affirmation can be found within smaller church communities; others do not feel as if they need to be affirmed by the Church at all. For those involved in policies and publications – our ‘upper echelon’ participants – a stark realisation is comprehended; bisexual support, if it exists at all, is not visible within Church of England environments (consider LLF001’s comment on ‘significan[ce]’ (line 261, p. 8). Whilst this may be due to a lack of presence or ability to raise support above grassroots level, this is also due to the heteronormative structures that are so pervasive within the CofE which, arguably, force these support networks to the fringes, or outside of the institution altogether. However, as previously stated, this research study only projects a very small percentage of voices, bisexual voices in particular, and there will undoubtedly be many bisexual Christians out there seeking support and affirmation whose voices are not being heard. With this in mind, I believe that the CofE should strongly consider utilising the following action points, to truly support and affirm its bisexual community:

1. Educate those who need to be educated

HH: How do you feel like we could achieve unity and affirmation and [...] educate [with]in the Church?

BC001: ‘I think that level of education [can be shared from the community] and those resources that aren't in *Living in Love and Faith* [...], having people existing openly in those spaces, [...] I think providing that human connection and having more people existing in a Christian space, especially bisexuals that aren't represented nearly enough [...], having those people in those environments, I think, would do wonders [...] just removing that fear factor from asking questions such as “what are your pronouns?” or “what does it mean to you?” or even “what does bisexuality mean to you?” Just allowing people to have those discussions in a safe space’ (Selection from lines 445 - 460, p. 15)

Education plays a key role in the journey towards complete support and affirmation. This research shows a clear perception that the CofE’s understandings of bisexuality are outdated, and whilst statements have been made that claim those in power will work towards further understandings of the

identity, there are still clearly problems on the ground that have not been significantly addressed. Further action must be taken in order to understand the unique complexities of bisexuality, and how it differs to other queer Christian experiences. In turn, educating others on bisexuality will lead to a better understanding of how bisexual Christians can be truly affirmed, and not just welcomed, within Church of England communities, and what support they may need as they navigate their faith journeys.

2. Consider what has been said, and what needs to be done

LLF004: ‘It’s important now [that] people do feel the confidence to come out and to speak up because it just helps everybody. It’s not just about your community as bi or trans or intersex, it’s about helping everybody’ (lines 289 – 291, p. 10)

It is difficult to comprehend how bisexuals could ever feel supported and affirmed in a Church that has never truly spoken out on how the language in Section 5.8 of *Issues* came about, and whether the opinions within the text still ‘stand’ in the Church today. Whilst this document has been removed from the ordination process, no official statements have yet been released that actively consider what this text says about bisexuality and the impact it may have on the emotions of the community. When *LLF* was released, it was stated that this document would not replace *Issues*, but encourage new grounds for discussion. Therefore, bisexuality – at a minimum – should be discussed in light of newer, more developed understandings, so that in time a new statement can be released that shows how Christian understandings of bisexuality have developed in modern contexts, emphasising that whilst *Issues* is a product of its time, it is not suitable for the modern day. There should be, as LLF004 states, a confidence to speak out, both from the bisexual community, but also those within the CofE, to emphasise and underpin their support within these discussions.

3. Understand the unique beauty of bisexuality

BC010: 'I just don't mask it in any context [...] I see myself as queerfully and wonderfully made' (lines 81, 85, p. 3)

Bisexuality is a multifaceted identity, and bisexual individuals can bring a range of exceptional gifts to the CofE. Alford-Harkey and Haffner (2014, p. 3) state that faith communities should be helped to both 'embrace bisexual persons and reflect theologically on bisexuality brings gifts to congregations and to the practice of faith'. By embracing bisexuality, this 'contributes to a positive image of religion among people who may have rejected religion as intolerant or irrelevant. Such congregations become safe spaces for youth who are exploring their sexuality and have questions'. By actively embracing bisexual individuals and recognising the gifts they bring, the CofE can foster an environment of genuine welcome and affirmation rather than mere passive acceptance. When bisexuality is acknowledged as a valid and enriching aspect of faith communities, it challenges the heteronormative assumptions that often leave bisexual individuals feeling invisible or misunderstood. This visibility can provide a powerful counter-narrative to the exclusionary messages some have encountered, helping to heal past wounds and demonstrating that faith and bisexuality are not inherently at odds.

5.5.5a The 'other side': considering those who come from 'a place of love'

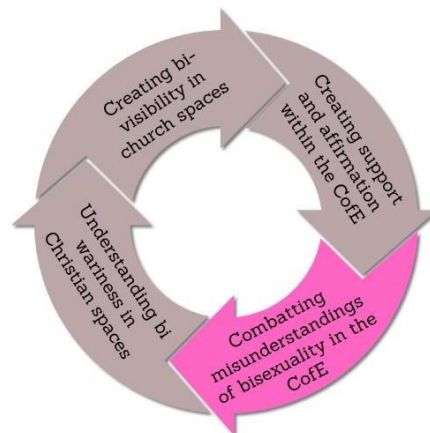
Encouraging, or even demanding, change is often fuelled with passion, and sometimes, it is not easy for those who feel wronged or ostracised to understand the arguments of those who make them feel this way. Whilst it is pertinent that the queer Christian community must be heard and understood, accepted, and loved, time should be taken to understand why others may preach a different kind of love and acceptance. I would like to turn to a comment made by Eve, a participant of mine who often spent time worshipping with more conservative Christians:

BC003: ‘For a lot of these people they genuinely think, in order to save someone that they need to not identify as queer anymore, and so [...] a lot of it isn't, kind of deliberate cruelty [...] it's coming from a place of love a lot of the time and wanting to help someone because they genuinely think that the best way to help someone is that, so I think if we were able to kind of understand that and not necessarily alienate those people either [...] there's a culture that fosters and supports them, and without understanding that, you're not going to be able to engage with people or change their mind’ (lines 212; 214 – 217; 221 – 223, p. 8)

Eve’s position is valid. For the bisexual participants, providing education on the particular issues and niches of the bisexual Christian community, and how things can change for the better, comes from a place of strength in the face of adversity, and challenging those who agree with stereotypes or lack understanding. However, in order for this educational approach to be truly fruitful, an understanding must be reached of the complexities of why certain individuals may react the way they do and aim to approach these intricacies with love and kindness. I would argue that this approach could be particularly successful for bisexual Christians, due to their understandings and battles with their own complexities. By acknowledging the sincerity behind conservative beliefs, however painful their implications may be, bisexual Christians can engage in dialogue that is not purely oppositional but instead rooted in compassionate education and mutual understanding. This approach does not mean excusing harm or accepting exclusion but rather recognising that true affirmation requires engagement with the structures and ideologies that uphold heteronormativity. Furthermore, lived religion plays a key role here. As bisexual Christians navigate both their faith and their sexual identity, they embody a faith experience that challenges rigid theological boundaries. Their ability to hold tensions, embrace nuance, and navigate complex spiritual landscapes makes them uniquely equipped to foster conversations that promote both personal transformation and institutional change. Rather than reinforcing division, this approach encourages a reframing of Christian love – one that is expansive enough to embrace difference and affirm the full humanity of all believers.

5.6 Combatting misunderstandings of bisexuality in the Church of England

Figure 12: The cyclical nature of ideal space: combatting misunderstandings



Bisexuality is often misunderstood in everyday life, with ‘misperceptions and flawed understandings of bisexuality’ being ‘quite common’ (Bernhardt-House, 2010, p. 55). The following sections will focus, in particular, on how language, and biphobia and bierasure, can contribute to misunderstandings of bisexuality within the CofE.

5.6.1 Queer and bisexual misunderstandings in Christianity

In Christianity, binary thinking is prevalent, particularly seen in Genesis where the creation story emphasises dualities such as light and dark, land and sea culminating in the binary of male and female. This binary notion is often used to argue against same-gender marriage, asserting that it undermines the intended complementarity of genders in God’s design (Wright, 2014). Callis (2014, p. 64) argues that ‘while the sexual binary of heterosexual and homosexual is shifting and becoming less hegemonic, it is still a power system of sexual categorisation’, an ‘either/or’ system that is challenged by the fluidity of bisexuality and other plurisexual identities’. Bisexuality faces misunderstanding and rejection within Christian interpretations of scripture, such as Romans 1:26-27, where bisexuality is not explicitly

acknowledged, perpetuating a narrow understanding of sexuality within the faith; Bernhardt-House (2010, p. 55) states that ‘the fundamental structure of certain Christian exegeses of their scriptures [...] may in fact preclude the acceptance of bisexuality’.

Relationships between queer and bisexual individuals, and Christian communities, can often be hostile, with stereotyping and exclusion perpetuated by misunderstandings. Mainstream religious condemnation has harmed sexual and gender minorities, leading many LGBT+ individuals who have faced discrimination from Christian circles to harbour negative views towards Christianity (Beagan and Hattie, 2015, p. 92). Conservative Christians often instill fear of hell, particularly among young people, contributing to animosity towards the LGBT+ community (Barton, 2010, p. 471). Misinterpretations of scripture, fear of change, and a perceived threat to traditional beliefs further fuel this hostility. Whilst research extensively explores Christian hostility towards the LGBT+ community, there is a lack of understanding surrounding LGBT+ hostility towards Christianity. Lack of comprehension about Christian teachings amongst LGBT+ individuals may intensify their anger, similar to Christian misunderstandings of the LGBT+ lives. McConnell and Mitchell’s (2011, p. 7) research into LGBT+ and Christian groups in Northern Ireland revealed a mutual alienation between the two groups, suggesting a failure to find belonging in either space due to misapprehensions, and a lack of understanding on both sides.

5.6.1a Bisexual/Christian misunderstandings

Ruth has experienced negative feelings towards both her religious and sexual identities in the LGBT+ and Christian communities respectively, partly down to misassumptions:

BC006: ‘It can be difficult being a bisexual Christian because if you tell people you’re Christian, naturally the go to for a lot of people is to assume that you’re homophobic, but in the LGBT+ community, I also have to be careful there because some people can also be just as biphobic as

the people in the Church as well, so it's quite a fraught kind of thing to navigate in general' – *Ruth* (lines 91 – 95, p. 3)

I would like to examine Ruth's response in two components: firstly, the presumption that being Christian inherently equates to being homophobic, and secondly, the issue of biphobia within the LGBT+ community.

5.6.1ai 'Inherently homophobic'

Scholarship, often focused on the United States, has 'linked high levels of religiosity and societal messages about religion to increased homophobic beliefs' (Miller and Stack, 2014, p. 246) (see also Linneman, 2004; Barnes and Meyer, 2012). In the UK, Christian churches have traditionally opposed non-heterosexuality on moral grounds (Hunt, 2014, p. 123). Although some churches have expressed support for the LGBT+ community, the predominant narrative continues to revolve around condemnation rather than acceptance. This dominant framing contributes to the production of religious spaces, both physical and symbolic, that are shaped by heteronormative assumptions and exclusionary practices. Such spatial dynamics can lead to widespread misunderstandings, with some assuming that Christianity is inherently homophobic, thereby alienating those whose identities do not conform to heterosexual norms. In Stonewall's (2022, p. 8) guide to celebrating bi inclusion in secondary schools, participant Sophie remarked that "in the comments of a Facebook post a stranger told me that I was 'not a real Christian' because I am bisexual." This comment illustrates how religious identity and sexual identity are often positioned as spatially incompatible.

Ruth used the word 'homophobic' here, which is the term that much research within this area focuses on. As I did not discuss this further with Ruth at the time, I can only assume that she used the term broadly. There are two ways to examine this. Firstly, Ruth informed me that she kept her sexuality

very private.

From a spatial perspective, this may reflect how certain identities must be tactically concealed in spaces structured by dominant power relations. For those with whom Ruth has shared her sexuality and faith identity, there may be an assumption, based on stereotypes and a binary framework of Christian sexual ethics, that she worships within a homophobic faith. However, this assumption itself is rooted in a heteronormative spatial imaginary that primarily understands Christian sexual morality through opposition to same-gender relationships, rather than recognising the specific marginalisation of bisexuality. As Lefebvre (1991) might suggest, the church as a conceived space – constructed through theology, institutional narratives, and social norms – often lacks the language or frameworks to meaningfully recognise bisexual identities. Whilst Ruth herself might interpret her experiences in terms of *biphobia* rather than *homophobia*, her use of the more general term may reflect the limited discursive and spatial tools available to her.

Secondly, it is possible that Ruth actively chose the term *homophobic* because it was more socially legible, or more tactically effective in naming her experience, to use de Certeau's (1984) phrasing. This raises the question: are there enough understandings of bisexuality, both within and outside of Christianity, for biphobia to be recognised and named on its own terms? As Massey (2005, p. 9) argues, space is relational and constituted through unequal power dynamics. Within Christian discourse, heteronormativity operates as a spatial logic that defines belonging in binary terms: heterosexual or homosexual, saved or sinful. Bisexuality disrupts this logic, yet is rarely given space to speak for itself. Whilst Christianity certainly contributes to the erasure of bisexuality through its binary frameworks, would those outside the faith community recognise this erasure as biphobia? Or is Christianity destined to be perceived primarily as a religion that condemns lesbian and gay individuals,

acknowledging bisexuality only when convenient, often through the same heteronormative lens that renders it invisible?

In this way, church spaces – material, discursive, and emotional – are produced in ways that often marginalise bisexual individuals, not necessarily through overt hostility, but through spatial exclusions that leave no room for their experiences to be acknowledged. Yet, bisexual Christians like Ruth find ways to tactically inhabit and negotiate these spaces, challenging the logics that would render them out of place.

5.6.1aii Biphobia within the LGBT+ community

This transitions us to Ruth's second point, regarding biphobia within the LGBT+ community. Despite sharing a status as sexual minorities, bisexuality is frequently misunderstood within the LGBT+ community, mirroring the misunderstandings found in heterosexual contexts. Barkett *et al* (2012, p. 21) argue that bisexuals face a 'double discrimination' [...] discriminated against both by heterosexuals and lesbians and gay people'. Whilst it may be assumed that lesbian and gay individuals would support a fellow sexual minority, bisexuality's fluidity and breaking of binaries can be met with contempt within the LGBT+ community, and 'negative attitudes [...] are common' (Roberts, Horne, and Hoyt, 2015, p. 556). Bisexuality is often seen as a transitional identity, where bisexuals are in denial and lack the courage to come out as gay or lesbian (p. 566). In Welzer-Lang's (2008, p. 84) study of biphobic attitudes, around 10% of survey respondents said that bisexuals were 'arrogant', 'feel superior' to gays and lesbians, are 'indecisive', and are 'lacking fidelity'. Some respondents went as far as to suggest that bisexuality did not even exist.

For bisexuals, these misunderstandings can cause great pain in a community that is supposed to

support and uplift them. This can lead bisexuals either to isolate themselves from queer communities or to identify as lesbian or gay around other LGBT+ people, in order to feel more accepted (Shaw, 2022, p. 104). For Ruth, this was very much the case; further discussions in her interview led her to express her wariness and even disdain toward integrating with LGBT+ communities, due to both her sexual identity being misunderstood, as well as her faith. From a spatial perspective, we might understand this as a form of displacement within spaces that are assumed to be safe – where bisexual Christians, despite being physically present, feel symbolically or socially out of place. As research has shown, many bisexuals suffer within LGBT+ communities due to harsh misunderstandings and stereotypes; for bisexual Christians, I would argue that this sense of exclusion is spatially intensified by their dual identity, which rarely finds full recognition or belonging in either faith or queer spaces.

5.6.2 Focusing on the ‘sex’ in bisexuality

One of the biggest misunderstandings faced by the bisexual community is the stereotype that all bisexuals are promiscuous, cheat on their partners, and engage in polyamory. Whilst some bisexuals will choose to engage in fruitful, multi-partner relationships, it is incorrect to apply this stereotype to all bisexuals simply because of their attraction to more than one gender identity. Baumgartner (2020, p. 115) states that ‘unfaithfulness is one of the most common stereotypes faced by bisexual women’, and McCormick (1994) suggests that ‘according to widely held but erroneous beliefs, bisexuals are destined to become unfaithful lovers who will destroy the hearts of their devoted lesbian, gay and heterosexual partners’. This stereotype, deeply rooted in heteronormative assumptions, constructs bisexuality as excessive, unstable, and inherently incompatible with monogamy. It also reveals how space, particularly relational and sexual space, is narrated through binary and moral expectations, positioning bisexuals as outsiders to normative frameworks.

Heteronormativity marginalises bisexual identities by presupposing that sexual relationships should follow binaried, monogamous partnerships. In this sense, bisexuality is often treated as spatially out of bounds – a disruption of the imagined order that governs acceptable intimacy. The Church of England is not spared from these discursive spatialities. Despite Bishops promising in 2023 to undertake further research into bisexuality and to develop their understandings, no official response has yet been given for the binegative language found in Section 5.8 of *Issues*. Here, bisexuals are cast as promiscuous and deviant, and unless they are willing to enter a ‘satisfactory’ heterosexual marriage, they must either pursue celibacy or seek healing, a framework that imposes a rigid moral cartography onto sexuality (Lefebvre, 1991 – *see* Kincaid, 2020). These messages reinforce a spatial script in which bisexuality must either be straightened, silenced, or rendered invisible within religious life.

Katie believes that these misunderstandings stem from the Church’s inability to learn and change, which reinforces outdated and exclusionary frameworks:

BC001: ‘For a Christian community that has historically buried its head in the sand when it comes to LGBTQ, their sort of language, even the term ‘bisexual’ is confusing, and so when I have come out to people in a church environment, there’s always... you can always tell if they know what you mean or not, which is the first thing. The second thing is the questions of life, either [a] stunned sort of silence, or, you know, “oh so is that... are you greedy?” or “are you promiscuous?”’ (lines 239 – 244, p. 8)

Katie’s reflection illustrates how bisexuality is not only misunderstood but also positioned as out of place in Christian discourse. The very language of bisexuality unsettles the spatial ordering of sexual norms within the Church, producing awkward silences, inappropriate questions, and confused responses – each a small rupture in the conceived space of Christian respectability. In her research on bisexual Christianity, Shepherd (2019, p. 142) spoke to several bisexual Christians in the UK and the US to gauge their opinions on polyamory. Responses were mixed; whilst some participants were

comfortable with the idea, others expressed ‘some hostility [...] in discussing polyamory and bisexuality in the same breath, as the former is often perceived to tar the reputation of bisexual people’. One such participant, Gabriela, stated that the confusion of polyamory and bisexuality ‘is frustrating and a cliché, since one doesn’t have to be bisexual to be polyamorous’. These reflections show how bisexual individuals must continually negotiate their belonging in spaces that conflate identity with behaviour, often deploying tactical disclosures or strategic silences (de Certeau, 1984, p. xix; p. 38) to resist oversimplification. Levy and Harr (2018, p. 189) argue that, for Christians, ‘this stigma’ makes ‘coming out to faith groups and gay and lesbian populations as bisexual or pansexual “[...] an act of bravery [that is] repeated over and over again”’ (see also Goodine, 2015, p. 108). These repeated acts of bravery highlight how bisexual Christians continually re-enter and re-negotiate spatial boundaries, asserting their presence in communities that often fail to make space for them.

Both Ruth and Leah agree with Katie’s argument. Ruth believes that bisexuals should be left alone, as long as all partners within a relationship understand each other’s rules and boundaries:

BC006: ‘I do think the attitudes towards bisexual people are very similar to the attitudes towards polyamorous people as well, and the whole idea of deceit and distrust going on and cheating too, when actually there doesn’t need to be. As long as people are committed to each other or they consent, and the rules and boundaries are all clear, then, you know, you should leave people alone’ (lines 266 – 270, p. 7)

Religion aside, Ruth believes that these misunderstandings are common for the bisexual community as a whole:

BC006: ‘I mean people are, forget about religion, people are funny about the idea of bisexuality anyway, because they have this attitude that they [bisexual people] might cheat and stuff’ (lines 141 – 142, p. 4)

Leah believes that Christianity ‘feeds into’ the promiscuity misunderstanding that bisexuals face:

BC008: ‘It’s interesting like... I think Christianity kinds of feeds into the idea of bisexuals being seen as quite promiscuous and just having sex all the time, which they’re not’ (lines 183 – 185, p. 7)

The above conversations with all three participants were in relation to *Issues*, and the Church’s misunderstanding of the bisexual identity. Toft (2014, p. 550) argues that ‘bisexuality is often seen as a choice by the Anglican Church – it is assumed that because an individual can be sexually involved with members of either sex then they can pick and choose one. So, if a bisexual individual can choose, they should ideally choose to be ‘heterosexual’ and then get married’. This view reflects a fundamental assumption rooted in heteronormativity. In this context, the Church's position hinges on the expectation that individuals conform to traditional, binary understandings of sexuality – either straight or gay – with little space for the nuances that bisexuality introduces. The Church assumes that because bisexuals are attracted to more than one gender, they must ultimately choose a ‘proper’ partner from either gender, reinforcing the belief that only heterosexual marriages are acceptable in their doctrine. The CofE, however, contradicts itself in this understanding. How can the Church state that bisexuals must choose a single partner – assuming they have the ability to choose – yet also perpetuate the stereotype that bisexuals are inherently promiscuous and must seek multiple partners? These contradictory messages reflect an underlying discomfort with bisexuality that is influenced by a rigid adherence to heteronormative structures. Instead of recognizing bisexuality as a legitimate and valid sexual identity that may involve monogamous or non-monogamous relationships, the Church's stance is framed within an outmoded framework that cannot reconcile bisexuality with its traditional teachings. The Church is yet to build on these discussions, which were last addressed in 2003 (see *Some Issues*), leaving the issue unresolved and reinforcing the heteronormative assumptions that continue to relegate bisexual

individuals to the sidelines. The failure to move beyond this narrow perspective prevents the Church from embracing a more inclusive understanding of sexuality and its broader implications for those who do not conform to heteronormative ideals.

5.6.3 Combatting misunderstandings

As previously discussed, bisexual individuals are frequently misunderstood within Christian spaces, particularly the Church of England. These misunderstandings contribute to deep frustration and alienation, prompting some bisexual Christians to leave the Church in search of more affirming denominations. Participant narratives reveal three key areas where the Church could improve its support: offering solidarity to bisexuals wrongly accused of homophobia, supporting those who face binegativity within LGBT+ communities, and addressing harmful misconceptions around promiscuity and polyamory.

Being labelled as homophobic for holding a Christian faith can be especially distressing for bisexuals, whose identities are already marginalised across both religious and queer spheres. In such moments, bisexual Christians may find themselves spatially dislocated; in faith communities that see their sexuality as incompatible, and in queer spaces that view their faith with suspicion. The Church should adopt a dual approach: creating internal support networks for those affected, and offering tools for constructive, non-judgemental dialogue. In doing so, the Church can disrupt the spatial binaries that often separate faith and queerness, enabling bisexual Christians to inhabit their identities more freely. The Church's deeply embedded heteronormative structures – reflected in doctrines that privilege binary and monogamous sexualities – produce a space where bisexuality is rendered invisible or morally suspect. These teachings not only exclude bisexual people, but also deny the validity of their lived experience. Drawing on Lefebvre (1991), we might understand this as a conceived religious space,

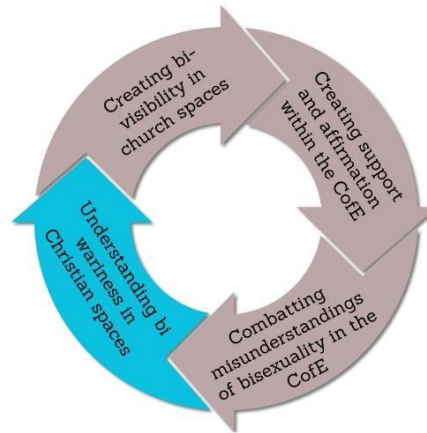
regulated by institutional norms that fail to accommodate bisexual Christians' relational realities. This pressure to conform to narrow ideals contributes to feelings of spiritual and emotional dislocation.

For bisexual Christians who face marginalisation in LGBT+ spaces, the Church can act as a place of refuge, but only if it actively reimagines itself as a site of inclusion. As Mia suggests, broader understanding is needed not just within the Church but also in LGBT+ communities: “a greater understanding of bisexuality would be good, from both lesbians, gay and otherwise queer people who aren't bi...” (BC002, lines 405–408, p. 14). Education is vital across both realms, drawing from academic research, lived experience, and LGBT+ Christian resources. Here, the concept of lived religion, everyday, embodied faith, offers a way to resist institutional boundaries and reclaim spiritual space. These small, personal acts of faith can be seen as tactics that challenge the dominant spatial logics of both Church and queer communities.

Finally, the Church must address harmful stereotypes surrounding bisexuality, particularly those linking bisexuality to promiscuity and polyamory. Language found in texts like *Issues in Human Sexuality* reinforces these views, framing bisexuality as something to be corrected through celibacy or heterosexual marriage. Acknowledging the damage such language causes is the first step toward change. Through theological education and pastoral care, the Church can begin to reshape its spiritual geography, one where bisexuality is not seen as excess or deviation, but as a valid and meaningful identity within Christian life.

5.7 Understanding bisexual wariness in Christian spaces

Figure 13: The cyclical nature of ideal space: understanding wariness



Joining a new community can be daunting, and for LGBT+ people of faith, entering a new church space can bring particular fears. When I first came to faith in my late teens, I was nervous to attend church, unsure of how I would be received. Fortunately, my church was welcoming, and due to my heterosexual relationship at the time, I had control over whether to disclose my sexuality – an experience of privilege not shared by many bisexual or LGBT+ Christians. For others, particularly bisexual individuals, entering a church can feel like stepping into uncertain terrain. Disclosure of identity is often fraught with risk, shaped by wider narratives of exclusion. The National LGBT Survey (2018, p. 14) found that faith organisations were most likely to have conducted conversion therapy, and Stonewall (2017b, p. 8) reported that LGBT people from non-Christian faiths are especially vulnerable to hate crime. Even within Christian contexts, nearly 3 in 10 LGBT people who visited a place of worship in the previous year experienced discrimination (Stonewall, 2017b, p. 7).

Spaces of worship, then, are not neutral: they are socially produced, infused with power, history, and the memories of inclusion or rejection. For bisexual Christians, this means navigating a space that

may feel simultaneously sacred and unsafe. However, Stonewall's guidance to faith communities – to engage with LGBT+ people, challenge prejudice, and champion inclusion – offers tools to reimagine church not as fixed and exclusionary, but as a living space open to transformation.

As a researcher, engaging with these insights allows me to reflect not only on how the Church of England might become a safer space for bisexual Christians, but also on how space itself is made meaningful through the lived experiences of those who inhabit it.

5.7.1 Caution: coming out in non-inclusive spaces

Although many of the bisexual participants in this research did feel welcome in their churches, there was still an underlying sense of fear and wariness for some. Out of the nine bisexual participants, I would argue that Ruth was the wariest in discussing her sexuality in relation to her faith. I am extremely grateful to her, therefore, that she felt able to share her journey with me, including more negative moments where she felt unsure as to whether speaking out would be the best option. During one of our discussions, I asked Ruth if she was a member of any sort of LGBT+ positive movements, such as an LGBT+ Student Union group at her university. Even when it came to organisations where faith may not have necessarily had a presence, Ruth stated:

BC006: 'I'm very wary of joining certain movements, because even if they might say they're inclusive, I don't know that and I'm the same with church. Like, I'll go there... but I'm very 'one foot in one foot out', I am very wary with who I am and how involved I get because you don't know who you're going to kind of meet, if that makes sense' (lines 37 – 40, p. 2)

It is not uncommon for LGBT+ Christians to feel wary about entering church spaces. Woodell and Schwadel's (2020, p. 379) study of LGB emerging adults argues that 'religious groups that are opposed to sexual minorities can create a hostile environment, thereby encouraging sexual minorities to

disaffiliate from religion or to decline in their religiosity'. Much research has been conducted into this area in the United States. Barringer, Gay, and Lynxwiler (2013, p. 240 -241) perhaps state the obvious; that 'homosexuality is a divisive issue amongst religious denominations in the United States', and that whilst acceptance of homosexuality is growing in US society, 'opposition and discrimination continues to ferment within organised religion'. 'Laura', the daughter of a preacher in the Bible Belt, claims how hard it can be to attend church when other parishioners have no fear in reminding you of 'what a horrible person you are' (Barton, 2010, p. 466).

5.7.1a Closer to home: mixed messages within UK churches

When considering Christianity in the UK, it may be tempting to view the situation for LGBT+ Christians as less fraught than in evangelical-dominated areas like the U.S. Bible Belt. Yet, the landscape is far from straightforward. While denominational acceptance has grown – Anglican opposition to same-gender marriage dropped from 70% in 1989 to about 25% by 2014 (Clements, 2017) – division remains, particularly within the Church of England. Ozanne (2023) criticises the Church's decision to bless same-gender couples as yet another instance of institutional delay, reflecting a broader tension between progressive and conservative factions.

These unresolved tensions render church spaces complex and often ambiguous for LGBT+ Christians. Even when denominations formally endorse inclusion, the everyday experience of local church communities may still be shaped by heteronormative norms. This means LGBT+ individuals often find themselves negotiating coded behaviours, selective disclosure, or silence, navigating space as contested and relational. In these spaces, LGBT+ Christians may have to navigate unspoken codes or indirect signals of acceptance, often engaging in a form of self-censorship or selective disclosure to avoid potential rejection. This highlights the need for churches to go beyond formal affirmations of

acceptance and engage in a deeper cultural shift that embraces a diversity of sexual and gender identities in both doctrine and practice. By addressing heteronormativity and fostering spaces that respect lived religion, it is hoped that Church communities could begin to work towards fostering a genuinely welcoming and inclusive environment for LGBT+ Christians, where faith and identity can coexist without fear or concealment.

5.7.2 What about bisexuals?

It has been stated, and will continue to be, that bisexual Christians are often forgotten in Christian discourse, and in turn there is a lack of support that exists for them. For bisexual Christians, their lived religious experiences are shaped not only by their personal faith but also by the ways in which they must navigate a church environment that often fails to acknowledge or fully accept their identity. The absence of explicit recognition of bisexuality within Christian discourse forces many bisexual Christians to either silence or downplay their sexual identity in church settings. Bisexuals religious expression, therefore, are shaped by the necessity of performing their faith in ways that feel safe and conform to the norms of the space they inhabit. In Shepherd's (2019, p. 158) research into bisexual Christians' experiences of church life, 'several participants alluded to the lack of provision for bisexual people in both the nomenclature and the activities of LGBT Christian organisations'. Alongside this, certain participants in Shepherd's study felt that in order to be accepted in a Christian space, rather than embracing their full identity, they had to internalise a sense of invisibility or isolation, either choosing to identify as gay or completely withholding aspects of their sexual identity to fit in – Shepherd's participants felt they had to be 'a bit quiet' about being bisexual, and if anything, 'just be gay' (p. 159). This issue undoubtedly stems from heteronormative, binary thinking that exists within both wider society and Christian spaces and for some bisexuals, creates a dissonance between their public faith and private sexual identity, leading to internal conflict and a sense of alienation. Such a

state of being, where faith and identity are compartmentalised, further demonstrates how heteronormative structures shape the lived experiences of bisexual Christians, pushing them to navigate their faith with caution and fear of judgment.

Shepherd also argues that the ‘sheer absence’ of bisexual Christians could also be contributed to through a ‘fear of coming out [...] in hetero- or homonormative circles’ (p. 159), factors that again could contribute to bisexual wariness within church spaces, including the CofE. For the Church to become a more inclusive space, it would need to acknowledge these lived experiences and create environments where bisexuality is recognised as a valid expression of human sexuality, free from the constraints of heteronormativity. This would allow bisexual Christians to experience a fuller, more integrated sense of self in both their spiritual and sexual identities and, ideally, would create a space in which bisexual wariness subsides, allowing those who identify in this way to freely express themselves.

5.7.3 Further thoughts on the wariness of coming out

Danielle and Lauren are two other participants who have felt wary about coming out in church spaces, especially if they have not been within a particular church space before:

BC008: ‘Again in church spaces, sometimes you know, in my church I’m out, but if I’m visiting another church sometimes I think, you know, it might not be great to bring this up, it would not be great to be myself in this situation’ – *Danielle* (lines 85 – 86, p. 4)

BC004: ‘Now I’m a little more guarded with it and I don’t think I would be, like, out in a new church, unless I felt like it was okay’ – *Lauren* (lines 55 – 56, p. 3)

In previous unpublished research, I focused on the relationship that LGBT+ Christian students had to both their home churches and university churches. For many of these students, their experiences in both churches differed greatly, with many choosing to be ‘out’ at university, but not at home. This

was because, in their university towns and cities, they had much more control over where they chose to worship, and could research inclusivity in advance, perhaps finding churches that were part of the Inclusive Church network or were home to a Christian LGBT+ worship group. This contrasted greatly to their home lives, where many of the students worshipped in a family church, and chose not to come out due to family members within the congregation not knowing, and a wariness of what other congregants may think. Whilst not every participant I interviewed for this research is, or has been, a student, I believe that this argument elevates Danielle's and Lauren's statements, both arguing that fear that can come from being unaware as to a church or congregation's attitudes towards LGBT+ rights, which can encourage LGBT+ Christians to hide their identity when entering a new church space.

Whilst Danielle, Lauren, and Ruth's points do not explicitly focus on their bisexuality and instead more so on their LGBT+ identity as a whole, navigating this wariness and being open about bisexual identity in the CofE can be especially difficult for bisexuals for multiple reasons. Firstly, there is still a clear misunderstanding of bisexuality in the CofE, with bisexuality often seen as a 'phase', or an identity that involves having multiple partners. Second, whilst not all, some churches may encourage bisexuals who are in hetero-presenting relationships to hide their identity in order to fit in with their congregation's ideals. Finally, whilst some churches may have managed to understand gay and lesbian identities, their knowledge may not have developed any further, causing confusion or discrimination towards non-monosexuality. Danielle herself has experienced the impact that this confusion or misunderstanding can have, stating that she has been seen as 'attacking' the Church, for questioning a lack of understanding about her identity:

BC008: 'Some Christians, even if they're completely open and accepting, they just won't really get what you're saying with issues you're having, and they'll see some things as like, attacks on the Church, whether or not, it was not meant to be an attack on the Church, it's just my experience... and so I do feel like I can only really like, fully be myself among people who

have also gone through the process of being queer and Christian' (lines 97 – 102, p. 4)

If Danielle finds solace only amongst those who have navigated the journey of being an LGBT+ Christian, then it underscores a pressing need for a shift in attitude and a deepening of education within the Church of England. The experience of feeling misunderstood, or even perceived as attacking the institution, speaks to the gap in knowledge and empathy regarding bisexuality, and more broadly, non-monosexuality within Christian spaces. This gap is not just a matter of individual misunderstanding, but a reflection of a broader, systemic issue that arises from heteronormativity, where sexual identities outside the heterosexual and homosexual binary are often neglected. Danielle's experience reveals the emotional toll that comes with navigating a religious space that is not fully equipped to embrace the diversity of sexual identities. For bisexual Christians like Danielle, their lived experiences are often met with a lack of recognition or support, leading them to feel isolated or as if they are 'attacking' the Church when all they seek is understanding and validation of their identity. Her remark about needing to be among others who share the experience of being both queer and Christian highlights the crucial role of shared experiences in fostering community. Without spaces where bisexual Christians can openly discuss their struggles, their faith, and their sexuality without judgment, they are forced to find support in smaller, more niche groups where their lived experiences are fully understood.

This sentiment was echoed by LLF005, who highlighted that if bisexuals currently do not perceive every Church congregation as safe and supportive, there is significant groundwork to be done. It should not be dismissed that having a shared identity can help in building community; in Formby's (2017, p. 49) study, 'having one's sexuality and faith understood was important, and for some this meant contacting people and establishing friendships with people whom they shared a faith: 'The LGBT friends I feel most connected with are a number of people who share the same faith and who have known

what it's like to battle to reconcile sexuality with Christianity' - survey respondent 206'. However, despite this awareness, it is crucial not to overlook or justify the apprehension and distress experienced by certain bisexual Christians when they enter church spaces. These challenges are deeply intertwined with the pervasive influence of heteronormativity within many church environments. This normative expectation can create an environment where bisexual Christians, who do not fit neatly within this binary understanding of sexuality, may feel invisible or misunderstood. They may be left navigating church spaces that, while theoretically supportive, still operate under implicit assumptions about gender and sexuality. This often results in bisexual Christians facing an internal conflict, where they feel the need to downplay or hide parts of their identity in order to be accepted, thus reinforcing a disconnection between their public and private selves. The discomfort many bisexual Christians experience when attempting to navigate church spaces in this way underlines the need for these environments to move beyond simply affirming LGBT+ rights in theory, and instead focus on fostering a culture where individuals can freely express their full identities. This would require churches to confront and dismantle the heteronormative assumptions that shape so much of religious discourse, allowing bisexual Christians to engage in their faith without fear of rejection or having to compartmentalise their sexuality. Only by creating spaces that genuinely support and understand the lived experiences of bisexual individuals can the Church hope to foster a more inclusive and affirming community.

5.7.4 Combatting bisexual wariness: what needs to be done?

We must now consider what can be done in order to address this apprehension and create an environment where bisexual Christians feel secure and can freely express themselves within the CoFE. Ruth offers an insightful and compelling response to this inquiry:

BC006: 'If you want to show that you love and accept everybody, which is what Christ asked

us to do, you have to make it absolutely clear, you have to bring it up. So it is even more damaging, I would say, people not mentioning it at all, as opposed to other churches, who might have a strong anti-LGBT stance, like at least you can, you know, you know that they're the kind of churches to avoid within the Church of England. If you don't say anything, well then what do we do with that?' (lines 200 – 205, p. 6)

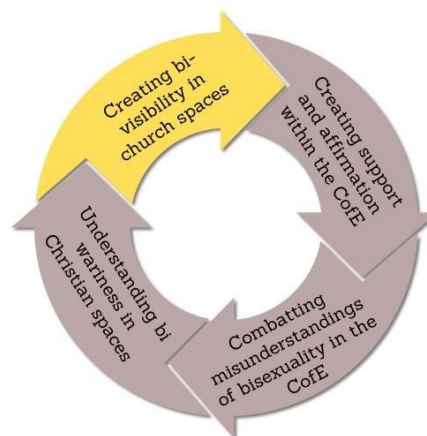
To clarify, Ruth stresses the importance of churches being clear about their views on LGBT+ inclusivity. As of 2023 many Christian groups, such as the Student Christian Movement (SCM), are supporting LGBT+ inclusivity. In 2022, SCM began their Honest Church campaign, which calls for churches to be more open and honest about their positioning on LGBT+ inclusivity. By encouraging churches to be open about their attitudes towards the LGBT+ community – even if these attitudes are non-affirming – LGBT+ Christians will be aware of which church spaces are safe to them for worship within. I would argue that for bisexual Christians, achieving true inclusivity requires going a step further. Whilst churches may preach messages of inclusivity for the LGBT+ community, is this enough for bisexuals who may still feel misunderstood? Building on the notion of safe spaces for bisexuals, as discussed by [LLF005](#), what education can be put into practice to ensure that bisexuals genuinely feel welcome in CofE spaces? As Katie comments, 'the thing about bisexuality that's perhaps slightly different from coming out as gay and lesbian is that there's that extra element of education for someone to understand what it is that you're saying' ([BC001](#), lines 237 – 239, p. 8), emphasising the importance of bi-specific education to create spaces where bisexuals feel welcome, instead of wary.

Although my study does not propose highly specific solutions, I believe that moving forward, the Church must exert more effort to ensure that non-monosexual individuals feel equally embraced, accepted, and loved as their heterosexual, lesbian, and gay counterparts. This is crucial in addressing and overcoming bisexual apprehension once and for all. However, creating true inclusivity requires a deeper shift within the Church, one that goes beyond simply acknowledging LGBT+ identities and

addresses the heteronormative assumptions that underlie many church environments. Heteronormativity continues to shape much of the Church of England's teachings and practices. This assumption can make bisexual Christians feel that their identities are either invisible or misunderstood, since they do not fit neatly into the traditional gay-straight binary that often dominates LGBT+ discourse. To be fully inclusive, the Church must move beyond merely accepting gay and lesbian identities and actively confront the heteronormative structures that sideline bisexual individuals. By recognising bisexuality not as a phase or confusion, but as a legitimate sexual orientation, the Church can take significant steps toward ensuring that bisexual Christians feel truly seen and valued and in turn, feel less wary or apprehensive in Church spaces.

5.8 Creating visibility

Figure 14: The cyclical nature of ideal space: creating bisexual visibility



As has been noted frequently throughout this thesis, bisexuality often remains visible within public discourses due to an ingrained binary understanding of sexuality (Hayfield, 2021, p.9). However, this is not to say that bisexuality is completely invisible. In over 30 nations, Bisexual Visibility Day is

celebrated on September 23rd each year. Bisexuality is now often shown as a valid sexual identity within television and literature, as opposed to a transitional identity³², and in the celebrity world, many celebrities are openly embracing their bisexual identity, such as Kit Connor, who plays Nick Nelson in *Heartstopper*, television and film star Aubrey Plaza, and in the social media world, TikTok star Auli'i Cravalho.

Unfortunately, bisexual individuals often find themselves lacking visibility, particularly within faith settings such as the CoFE. Toft (2014, p.551) suggests that 'bisexuality becomes invisible because it sits in the middle of both homosexuality and heterosexuality', perpetuating a binary mindset that is common in Christian circles. Consequently, when bisexuality is acknowledged, it is frequently misinterpreted. In an interview with the Rev. Janet Edwards (2014), she recalled disclosing her bisexual identity to her pastor; it was immediately misconstrued, with her sexual orientation wrongly equated with potential infidelity to her husband. Although this misunderstanding sparked a constructive dialogue, many other bisexual individuals may feel compelled to conceal their identities to avoid constant misinterpretations or potential backlash.

5.8.1 Living with invisibility and 'heterosexual privilege'

Bisexual participants who discussed visibility within the Church frequently described feeling invisible. Surprisingly, this invisibility could be both detrimental and advantageous in their Church interactions. For instance, Danielle noted that discussing her past partners could effectively obscure her bisexuality, enabling her to access spaces typically reserved for heterosexual individuals:

³² See Rosa Diaz in *Brooklyn 99* (2013 – 2021), Nick Nelson in *Heartstopper* (2022 – present), Adam Groff in *Sex Education* (2019 – 2023), Alex Claremont-Diaz in *Red, White, and Royal Blue* (2019), and Evelyn in *The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo* (2017).

BC008: ‘You definitely get that invisibility and [...] access to spaces that I think gay or lesbian or trans people wouldn’t get access to, just through being able to talk about an ex and using he/him pronouns for that and then people are just like oh, because, even if they thought you were gay before, they now realise you’re ‘straight’ because they don’t know that bi exists, and so, it’s kind of, thinking for a while that you’re straight because she’s talking about Dan who she dated three years ago, [so] she’s straight, and then you get welcomed into these places where you’re not really welcome’ (lines 192 – 198, p. 7)

I would like to pay particular attention to two points that Danielle raises in this quotation. Firstly, when mentioning different partners, it is not uncommon for one to assume that an individual has made the ‘leap’ from homosexual to heterosexual, or vice versa. Garrigan (2009, p. 215) asks, ‘are bisexual people mis-portrayed as “straight” if they are in a male–female relationship?’. The answer is likely, ‘yes’. Alford-Harkey and Haffner (2014, p. 60), reflecting on the fragmentation experienced by queer people of faith, especially those of colour, argue that ‘for bisexual persons, this sense of fragmentation can be even more profound, as they are almost always assumed to be lesbian/straight’. This binary lens, which privileges visibility through fixed, legible identities, ‘discounts the plurality and complexity of sexuality’ (Roberts, Horne, and Hoyt, 2015, p. 554) and renders bisexuality ‘invisible, and therefore at a social disadvantage’ (p. 554).

This binary mindset, as Danielle highlights, is deeply embedded in many Christian spaces. Despite bisexual people comprising over half of the LGBT population, Shepherd (2021, p. 52) argues that affirming discourses within certain Christian denominations continue to struggle with moving beyond binary understandings of sexuality. Spatially, these environments are shaped by hegemonic norms that privilege heterosexuality and binary sexual categories. Drawing on Massey’s conception of space as relational and continually produced, we can understand Christian spaces, such as churches, fellowship groups, and even theological discourse, not as static or neutral, but as spaces actively shaped

through interactions, exclusions, and assumed norms. However, as Toft (2014) observes, this is not universally experienced as negative. Some bisexual Christians have found ways to leverage what is often termed ‘heterosexual privilege’ as a means of negotiating more conservative or rigidly gendered spaces. As Danielle points out, this can facilitate a level of acceptance in contexts where overt queerness might be met with hostility. Roberts, Horne, and Hoyt (2015, p. 556) note that this so-called privilege is also a source of tension, as it can be read as inauthenticity by others in LGBT+ spaces. Nevertheless, Toft’s (2014, p. 560) participants described how ‘actively play[ing] down their sexual selves’ allowed them to ‘celebrate the flexibility of bisexuality’ and find ways to belong across both heterosexual and homosexual contexts.

Yet, Massey’s spatial theory reminds us that the openness of space does not imply equality within it. Christian environments are not empty stages; they are power-laden spaces in which certain identities are more legible, visible, or safe than others. For many bisexual Christians, particularly within the Church of England, the interplay between bisexual invisibility and heterosexual privilege can have detrimental effects, making their identity less comprehensible, and their inclusion more conditional. True visibility and understanding require not only a disruption of binary thinking, but a reshaping of the relational dynamics that continue to produce bisexuality as marginal within Christian space.

5.8.2 Visibility in discourse

Ben, when discussing visibility, made particular note of how bisexual (in)visibility can be exacerbated in Christian discourse:

BC010: ‘But with the Church... it just doesn’t factor into the discourse, and then that does make it easier to deal with the discourse because it’s not attacking you [...] It’s just invisible which again, is sort of between oh you’re not talking about me, which means I’m not being supported, but equally it means that, like you’re not creating the conditions which means I need to be supported more because you’ve created biphobia in the Church’ (lines 98 – 99; 107 – 110, pp. 4).

For absolute clarity, I believe Ben's argument can be broken down into the following ways of thinking:

1. By completing ignoring bisexuality, I am *invisible*, but then I am *not attacked*.
2. I am *not supported* because you do not talk about me; through this ignorance, therefore, *the conditions in which I would need to be supported do not exist*.

As with Danielle's discussion, Ben's reflections highlight the complex interplay between visibility, silence, and space in the Church's engagement with bisexuality. Whilst Shepherd (2021, p. 58) notes a persistent 'paucity of discourse on bisexuality in particular in the church', this absence is not simply a neutral silence, but a spatial dynamic – what Massey (2005) would frame as a product of relational power and exclusion. Church spaces are not merely physical buildings, but social constructs shaped by what is spoken, legitimised, and made visible. In this context, bisexuality remains largely unarticulated, its absence reinforcing normative boundaries of sexuality within Christian discourse.

There are multiple reasons for this ongoing silence. Goss (1999, p. 52) suggests that bisexual theology poses a subversive challenge to both gay/lesbian and heterosexual theologies, which often operate within an either/or binary. A bisexual theological perspective, by contrast, unsettles these fixed categories, resisting the kind of legibility that fits neatly into dominant theological frameworks. Similarly, Shepherd (2019) critiques how monosexist discourses, particularly those that hinge on fixed, immutable same-sex attraction, may feel threatened by bisexual identities, which introduce fluidity and ambiguity. However, as Ben suggests, this erasure can sometimes function as a protective mechanism. Within the relational space of the Church, where power and belonging are negotiated through visibility and silence, remaining unspoken as bisexual can help individuals avoid confrontation or exclusion. Yet

this form of spatial negotiation comes at a cost: partial belonging, contingent on the suppression of one's full identity. In this way, the absence of bisexual discourse is not simply a matter of theological neglect, but a spatial marginalisation – where bisexuality is rendered peripheral to the imagined centre of Christian life and community.

By applying Massey's theory, we are reminded that space is always in the making – it is a realm of 'continuous production and reconfiguration' (2005, p. 61), shaped by what is said and left unsaid, by who is recognised and who remains invisible. If the Church is to become a space of genuine inclusion, it must critically examine these absences and make room for the presence of bisexual voices, not just in theory, but in practice, theology, and community life.

5.8.3 Improving bisexual visibility

What can be done to improve bisexual visibility within the CofE? I argue we can adopt a two-fold approach, based on the arguments presented by Danielle and Ben; tackling monosexism and bisexual erasure within Church spaces, and encouraging discourse on bisexuality, in order to see bisexuality as a legitimate sexual identity.

In their bisexual resource book, Alford-Harkey and Haffner (2014) advocate for the inclusion of bisexual voices within Christian communities. They urge religious leaders and congregations to actively engage in conversations with individuals who openly identify as bisexual to raise awareness and foster discussions on bisexuality. This proactive approach aims to normalise bisexuality within Christian spaces and, with sustained efforts from advocates, contribute to its increased recognition and visibility within the Church of England. By 'assum[ing] that bisexual people are present in the congregation' (Alford-Harkey and Haffner, 2014, p. 56), bisexuals who do not wish to engage with

heterosexual privilege and have their identity visibilised will be able to achieve this. When interviewing the *LLF* participants, even as ‘outsiders’ to the visibility issues that bisexuals face within the Church, they were able to provide ways in which they believed bisexuality could be ‘seen’ amongst the rest of the community. LLF003 shared in their interview that there was a normalisation of language surrounding bisexuality, amalgamating it with that of lesbian and gay language. How can bisexuals expect to be seen, and have hope of being seen, if their experiences are not uniquely recognised? This re-emphasises Ben’s argument about a lack of bisexual discourse and highlights the serious need for a specific bisexual discourse to be created; including bisexuality within lesbian and gay discourses will only continue to invisibilise this identity.

Ultimately, Christian communities in the CofE must make more conscious efforts to recognise the pain that bisexual invisibility can cause in all walks of life, and tackle this within their particular communities to ease the burdens that bisexual Christians face; ‘congregations that embrace bisexual persons can also help heal the suffering caused by the invisibility of bisexual people in society’ (Alford-Harkey and Haffner, 2014, p. 3). The CofE is not yet near the stage where its congregations could be seen as ‘bisexually healthy’, however, promoting bisexual visibility and allowing people ‘who identify as bisexual [...] [to be] hear[d] and see their experiences, concerns, and gifts reflected’ (p. 54) will allow for bisexual visibility to grow, and in turn for bisexual Christians to flourish and feel seen and heard, in the Church of England. I believe LLF002 sums up the need for visibility the best: ‘an acknowledgement that there are people who are bisexual and are Christians, ‘the end’, would be quite useful really’ (lines 461 – 462, p. 15)!

5.9 Concluding thoughts

This chapter has advocated for the creation of ideal bisexual Christian spaces within the CofE, where

bisexual individuals can feel safe and authentic without having their experiences overshadowed or conflated with those of their lesbian and gay counterparts. However, as stated at the outset, this argument is not rooted in the belief that bisexual Christians require ‘special treatment’ or that their experiences are so vastly different as to necessitate an entirely separate framework of support. Rather, the intention is to highlight the specific ways in which bisexuality is often misunderstood or overlooked within both the Church and broader LGBT+ discourse, leading to a lack of tailored guidance and meaningful inclusion. Addressing this gap is not about fostering division but about ensuring that bisexual Christians have access to resources that accurately reflect their lived realities and the complexities of their faith journey. LLF001 offered a compelling perspective that underscores the broader significance of bisexual identity in relation to religious belonging:

LLF001: ‘If you are a bi person in some way, you are already open to the idea that you know things don’t necessarily fall into neat binaries actually that might have an impact on your spirituality and the way that you see yourself in relation to, like, a mainstream faith tradition, as well’ (lines 252 – 255, p. 8).

This observation speaks to the unique position of bisexual individuals within Christian spaces, where traditional teachings often rely on rigid, binary understandings of sexuality, gender, and relationships. The Church of England, despite its movement towards greater LGBT+ inclusion, continues to operate within a framework shaped by heteronormative assumptions. Marriage, for example, remains institutionally defined as a covenant between a man and a woman, reinforcing the notion that heterosexuality is the normative and divinely sanctioned model for relationships. Even in more affirming congregations, bisexuality is frequently misunderstood through a binary lens—either assumed to be a ‘phase’ before settling into a monosexual identity or seen as inherently linked to promiscuity and moral ambiguity. Such misconceptions not only alienate bisexual Christians but also make it difficult for them to find spaces where their experiences are fully acknowledged.

The absence of bisexual-specific support within the Church reflects these underlying issues. At present, no official bisexual spaces or support groups exist within the Church of England. LLF001 stated that they ‘don’t know of any groups that are specifically set up to support bi Christians’ (lines 244 – 245, p. 8), and LLF003 believes that at this time, they would be wary of any groups that were started, due to the Church still upholding a very dated view of bisexuality:

LLF003: ‘I’m not aware of, as it were, officially sanctioned and supported groups providing support in the Church of England, and I mean I would love there to be more support. It’s hard to believe at the moment, and unless things change, at the moment I wouldn’t really trust a kind of official Church of England support group, given that the Church of England’s official teaching doesn’t really support bisexual people, or people in same-sex relationships or a whole range of other people’ (lines 207 – 121, p. 7)

This concern raises an important question: even if the Church were to create spaces specifically for bisexual Christians, would these spaces genuinely reflect and validate bisexual identities, or would they be subtly constrained by heteronormative theological perspectives? The challenge lies in ensuring that such spaces are not merely extensions of existing structures that already fail to address bisexual experiences in a meaningful way. If bisexual Christians are expected to conform to traditional Church teachings, teachings that often position bisexuality as an aberration or an uncertainty to be resolved, then the very premise of support becomes compromised. From the perspective of lived religion, this tension is particularly significant. Bisexual Christians must navigate their faith not only within the official doctrine of the Church but also in their daily interactions with congregations, clergy, and wider Christian communities. The way bisexuality is understood (or misunderstood) in these everyday religious spaces directly affects the degree to which bisexual individuals feel seen, valued, and included. For some, reconciling faith and sexuality requires a constant negotiation between personal conviction and communal belonging, often in spaces where heteronormative expectations dictate what

is considered ‘acceptable’ expressions of identity. Without intentional efforts to challenge these assumptions, bisexual Christians may find that the only way to remain part of the Church is to downplay or silence aspects of their identity – an act of self-erasure that stands in stark contrast to the Church’s proclaimed mission of love and inclusion.

Ultimately, the Church of England must confront these structural and cultural barriers if it is to foster truly inclusive spaces for bisexual Christians. This process begins with centring bisexual voices in conversations about faith and sexuality, ensuring that their perspectives are not filtered through the lens of monosexual experiences. Rather than being represented or spoken for by others, bisexual Christians must be given the agency to articulate their own needs and shape the resources that will support them. As LLF001 suggested, bisexual individuals often develop a perspective that challenges traditional binaries. a perspective that could, if embraced, enrich theological discourse within the Church. However, this potential will remain unrealised if bisexual Christians continue to be marginalised within both Church teachings and the everyday practices of lived religion.

For those who seek to establish bisexual-affirming spaces within the Church, the experiences and insights presented in this study provide a critical foundation. Whilst my guidance document does not propose an immediate or definitive solution, it offers a basis for discussion and reflection – one that acknowledges the complexity of bisexual identity and the necessity of moving beyond heteronormative assumptions. If bisexuality is to flourish within the Church, then openness, education, and a willingness to engage in genuine dialogue must be at the forefront of institutional change. In time, it is hoped that resources such as my guidance document (see Appendix K, p. 543) will contribute to a broader movement towards inclusion, one that not only affirms bisexual Christians but also challenges the structural and theological norms that have long rendered them invisible.

Chapter 6

Between belief and desire: bisexual perspectives of marriage in the Church of England

BC002: ‘So how do I feel about the Church’s attitude towards it [marriage]... it sucks. One of the things that really gets me is that priests can bless trees and buildings and tractors and sheep and, I don’t know, rings, they can bless rings, they could bless our house, they could bless our family, but they will not be allowed to bless our relationship’ – *Mia* (commenting in March 2022, roughly 10 months before the Church of England announced it would begin drafting plans to bless same-sex marriages) (Lines 205, 207 – 210, pp. 7 – 8)

‘I think her argument is so important and gives you a lot to consider – why can a priest bless so many things, and yet just be totally unable to bless two very loving and very committed same- sex people? I could hear her emotions in her voice, this is obviously quite a sore spot for Mia’ (Research diary entry, 30/02/2022)

6.1 Research statements

This chapter addresses **Research Statement 1** and **Research Statement 3**. The data in this chapter aims to platform the unique challenges that bisexual Christians face when considering their identity as both bisexual and Christian in marriage, how these identities can be challenged, ‘betrayed’ and misunderstood, and how marriage is navigated when considering one’s faith and sexual identity. This then links to how the data will consider the intersections and influences between these two identity aspects, and to question how the experiences of the bisexual Christian participants can and could shape conversations and processes surrounding marriage moving forward. Additionally, this chapter will examine the role of heteronormativity in shaping understandings of marriage within the Church of England, particularly how prevailing assumptions about gender, sexuality, and relationships contribute to the marginalisation of bisexual individuals. It will explore how bisexual Christians navigate, resist, or conform to these heteronormative expectations in their lived experiences of faith and marriage. Furthermore, this chapter will engage with the concept of lived religion, considering how bisexual Christians actively negotiate their faith in everyday life, beyond institutional doctrines, and how their personal and communal religious practices intersect with their understanding of marriage, identity, and belonging within the Church.

Research Statement 2 is not addressed in as much detail within this chapter, that is, as there is limited data presented from the *LLF* participants. This is because marriage, whilst a more ‘one-sided’ topic when considering both interview groups, was a particularly important and emotionally driven topic within the bisexual group, and was not discussed in-depth with any *LLF* participants. Nonetheless, when marriage has been mentioned within the *LLF* interviews, these comments (if relevant) will be presented in this chapter.

This chapter will now move to considering a broad scope of Christian marriage before presenting a detailed analysis of the discussions of marriage from within the interview processes.

6.2 Defining the scope of Christian marriage

In its dedicated chapter on marriage, *LLF* states that ‘marriage is an honourable estate. A way [...] of life that supports and brings food not only to those who enter into it but also to the lives of the children who belong to it and the life of society as a whole’ (Church of England, 2020a, p. 24). Marriage is a sign of the ‘mystical union that is betwixt Christ and his Church’, signifying the goodness of Creation and the affirmation of the interdependence of humanity. It is an institution in which the story of salvation is depicted, and life can be created (Church of England, 2023a, pp. 2 – 5). From the inception of the Christian faith, Christians have revered this ‘mystical’ and monogamous union as one exclusively between a man and woman, a lifelong commitment which is divinely blessed. Thatcher (1999, p. 9) argues that marriage is a sacrament, ‘a universal institution which, theologically speaking, is given with creation itself’, and it is deemed that early Christian thoughts on marriage have ‘an enormous influence on the development of Christian ethics and, indeed, on the marital ethos of the Western world more generally’ (Hunter, 2018, p. 1).

Marriage also takes on various definitions that are shaped by biblical interpretation. Genesis 2:24 is often cited as a foundational or ‘normative definition’ (Warner, 2017, p. 274) of marriage, as well as ‘the foundation of monogamy’ (Batto, 2000, p. 621), although these arguments are contested. St Paul, in Ephesians, contributes to the understanding of marriage by illustrating the ways in which ‘husbands and wives should model their behaviour on the relationships between Christ and the Church’ (Hamilton Jr., 2010, p. 263). This model proposes that a wife’s connection to her husband, ‘like the Church’s relationship with Christ [...] is meant to be a free and gracious response to his love’ (Healy, 2012, p. 149). As highlighted at the beginning of this section, marriage serves as an institution where the narrative of salvation unfolds. The CofE (2023, p. 4) contends that ‘the goal of Creation is [to form an] intimate union between God and his Creation [...] Marriage, as the coming together of difference in unity, is a deep sign and picture of this’. This perspective illustrates why St Paul chooses to represent the relationship between husband and wife through the image of Christ and the Church.

6.2.1 Christianity and same-gender marriage

Perhaps unsurprisingly, same-gender marriage emerges as arguably the most hotly debated topic in Christian marriage discourse, spanning across various denominations. The issue is both complex and continuous, marked by divergent stances within different denominations either in favour of or against same-gender marriage. One contributing factor to Christianity’s struggle in accepting same-gender marriage is that ‘Christians are being asked to accept a redefinition of the institution of marriage’ (Goldingay *et al.*, 2011, p. 1) which, for some, clashes with biblical interpretations and disregards the sacred nature of marriage. Heteronormativity plays a significant role in shaping these debates, as it underpins many of the theological, cultural, and institutional arguments against same-gender marriage. The traditional Christian model of marriage is deeply rooted in heteronormative assumptions that position heterosexuality as the natural, divinely ordained standard for relationships and family life. This

is evident in the desire to maintain a traditional understanding of scripture (van Eck, 2020), concerns that embracing same-gender marriage contradicts cultural and historical perceptions of marriage (Eskridge Jr., 1993), and anxieties about its potential impact on families (e.g., some Christians may assert that children fare better in a nuclear family unit rather than with same-gender parents) (Edgell and Docka, 2007). Furthermore, some view the sanctity of marriage as a sacred institution designed by God, which should conform to the biblical model of heterosexual marriage (Stone, 2014). These perspectives reveal how heteronormativity continues to shape Christian understandings of marriage, reinforcing a binary framework that challenges the inclusion of diverse sexual identities and relationships within the Church.

Nevertheless, there exists a significant cohort of Christians who contend that same-gender marriage aligns with the tenets of the Christian faith. Christians who are more progressive may assert that interpretations of the Bible's teachings on homosexuality and marriage have been misconstrued. They argue that scriptures do not explicitly condemn loving, committed same-gender relationships, instead emphasising that the Bible teaches love, compassion, and acceptance for all (Sharpe, 2011). Considering cultural and historical norms, there are many Christian denominations around the world (see the Episcopal Church in the United States, the Church of Sweden, the Anglican Church of Southern Africa, to name but a few) who have adapted their theological perspectives in response to said evolving norms, alongside an enhanced comprehension of human sexuality and relationships. In doing so, these churches actively challenge heteronormativity by reinterpreting scripture through an inclusive lens, officiating and blessing same-gender marriages, and affirming LGBT+ individuals within their communities. By ordaining openly LGBT+ clergy and incorporating gender-inclusive language into liturgy and doctrine, these denominations disrupt the assumption that heterosexuality is the natural or divinely mandated standard for Christian relationships. Furthermore, their theological

engagement with contemporary understandings of gender and sexuality reinforces the legitimacy of diverse relationships, while pastoral care and advocacy for LGBT+ rights within and beyond the Church work to dismantle exclusionary traditions. Through these efforts, progressive Christian denominations resist heteronormative frameworks and foster a more inclusive and affirming vision of marriage, sexuality, and faith.

To comment on the Anglican Communion specifically, in which the CofE resides, ‘within the Anglican Communion there are now churches which have fully embraced same-sex marriage, others which are seeking to affirm same-sex unions while upholding traditional marriage doctrine, others which reject such developments but remain in full communion with those pursuing them, and others who see any such changes as a departure from Scripture and Anglican teaching’ (Church of England, 2020a, p. 153). Although this chapter does not intend to offer an exhaustive examination of the Church’s broader stance on same-gender marriage, it will delve into the repercussions of this stance on the bisexual community. It will explore how, for certain bisexual Christians, it has motivated them to pursue marriage outside of the Church, or led them to cease contemplating the concept of marriage entirely until policy changes for the better.

6.2.2 Marriage and the Church of England

When turning to the CofE website, one may be surprised to note that there is no set definition of what marriage ‘is’ to those who worship within the Church. Whilst the website provides a comprehensive look into the Church’s order of service for marriage and provides couples who are considering a Church marriage with information on why marriage matters, and ways to build a fruitful relationship, one would be hard pressed to find online exactly how marriage is defined by the CofE. However, *LLF* provides us with a detailed ‘understanding of marriage as the Church of England has

received it' (2020, p. 24), including reflections on why same-gender marriage is not yet something that the Church can consider³³.

According to the text, the Church's liturgy 'describes marriage as "a gift of God in creation"' (Church of England, 2020a, p. 25), a gift which is given to all peoples; with this in mind, the Church states that it aims to make marriage accessible even to those who are not baptised, or actively following the Christian faith. Even if an individual is not practising faith or does not attend church, the CofE is legally required to marry a couple in a church space if one member of the couple is from the local parish; the Church of England Marriage Measure (2008n) extended the right to marry in certain churches to individuals whose parents or grandparents were married, baptised, or confirmed in a certain church space (this is known as a 'qualifying connection') (legislation.gov.uk, 2013, 1.1).

The above legislation encourages us to briefly consider a comment from Mia. Her comment, I would argue, does not quite fit into any of the subthemes that emerged in this data analysis, but I believe is very important, nonetheless. Mia states:

BC002: 'In my current job I deal with a lot of wedding enquiries for a church, so [...] I see a lot of people getting married who have like, no connection to the church, or just really like the building, and they're able to get married there and I'm, I'm not bitter anymore, I'm just kind of sad' (lines 212 – 217, p. 8)

Mia's point highlights the frustration and heartbreak experienced by Christians who wish to enter same-gender marriages, including those who identify as bisexual, when they see heterosexual

³³ For reference, the term 'marriage' appears 820 times in *Living in Love and Faith*. This includes the front and back covers of the text.

couples, regardless of their level of religious commitment, being granted the right to marry in a church, while devout queer Christians are denied the same opportunity. This disparity underscores the Church of England's reluctance to embrace change, particularly in comparison to other churches in the UK that have adopted more inclusive approaches. It also reflects the enduring influence of heteronormativity within the Church, where marriage continues to be institutionally defined through a heterosexual framework, reinforcing the exclusion of LGBT+ individuals. This tension between faith, identity, and institutional barriers will be explored further later in this chapter.

6.3 Marriage and bisexuality

Weinberger, Williams, and Pryor (1995, p. 93), in the ninth chapter of *Dual Attraction*, ask the following questions: 'Under what circumstances can marriage and bisexuality coexist? How can the bisexual partner sustain a marriage without compromising his/her sexual preference? Can disclosing bisexuality have positive consequences for a marriage or only negative ones?'. At a time when bisexuals were seen as promiscuous 'bedhopp[ers]' (Vernallis, 1999, p. 347) who contributed to the spread of HIV/AIDS, perhaps it is no wonder that these questions may have seemed normal, or appropriate. This assumption is deeply rooted in heteronormativity, which constructs marriage as a monogamous, gender-binary institution where sexual identity is expected to align with a fixed, exclusive attraction to one gender. Heteronormative frameworks position bisexuality as inherently disruptive to the stability of marriage, reinforcing fears of infidelity or an inability to commit. These biases are reflected in studies 'examining heterosexual attitudes towards bisexuals in the context of marriage found that bisexual men and women were not seen as viable partners in cross-orientation marriages with heterosexual, lesbian, or gay individuals' (Todd, Oravecz, and Vejar, 2016, p. 148). The bisexual identity is also seen to be lost during marriage; '[bisexual] individuals entering same-sex marriages are often misidentified as having either a gay or lesbian identity, even though they may identify

within the bisexual umbrella' (Todd, Oravecz, and Vejar, 2016, p. 145). For those who enter into marriages with a partner of another gender, anti-LGBT sentiment or 'relief' (Todd, Oravecz, and Vejar, 2016, p. 155) can arise from families, who are now under the impression that their child has chosen to 'reconnect to the heterosexual world' (Lannutti, 2008, p.253). Some bisexuals may use this as an opportunity to keep their identity hidden from their family, which only emphasises 'circulating monosexist understandings of sexuality' (Scherrer, Kazyak and Schmitz, 2015, p. 686).

The bisexual identity is also seen to be lost during marriage; '[bisexual] individuals entering same-sex marriages are often misidentified as having either a gay or lesbian identity, even though they may identify within the bisexual umbrella' (Todd, Oravecz, and Vejar, 2016, p. 145). For those who enter into marriages with a partner of another gender, anti-LGBT sentiment or 'relief' (Todd, Oravecz, and Vejar, 2016, p. 155) can arise from families, who are now under the impression that their child has chosen to 'reconnect to the heterosexual world' (Lannutti, 2008, p.253). Some bisexuals may use this as an opportunity to keep their identity hidden from their family, which only emphasises 'circulating monosexist understandings of sexuality' (Scherrer, Kazyak and Schmitz, 2015, p. 686).

For many bisexual individuals, the concept of marriage can evoke feelings of frustration and confusion. It is a common preconception that by committing to marriage, bisexuals are 'picking a side', or are chastised for entering a legal relationship where they will 'undoubtedly' seek other partners. It is important to note that in certain marriages, seeking other partners may be explicitly agreed upon between the couple; however, this should not be assumed solely because one or both individuals identify as bisexual.

6.4 The emerging subthemes

During the process of interview discussions with the bisexual participants, the following subthemes emerged from the discussions surrounding marriage:

1. **Guilt** in embracing heteronormativity and heterosexual privilege, through presenting as heterosexual
2. **Questioning** how it can be ‘fair’ to embrace heterosexual privilege through marrying in the CofE.
3. The impact of marriage on **faith and sexual identity**: betraying identity, and the complexity of emotion.
4. Using bisexuality as a tool for **activism**: how can bisexuals within the Church of England use their positions of privilege to fight for marriage equality?

6.4.1 Definitions of marriage and potential limitations

As the data analysis in the following sections will show, the bisexual Christian participants in this study give a variety of meanings to the broader question of what marriage can mean as an individual, be that a religious individual and/or queer individual. Some participants see marriage as a deeply religious institution that should be officiated in a church and before God, such as Eve, whose opinion highlights the traditional Christian view of marriage as a sacred covenant (see Section 6.6.1). For others, especially those in same-gender relationships, frustration is expressed that the Church blesses inanimate objects but refuses to bless their loving relationships (as shown by Mia, mainly noted in Section 6.2.2). This attitude demonstrates the tension between personal faith and institutional restrictions. Some bisexual participants, as will be shown, feel guilty about embracing their heterosexual privilege within a religious space, which suggests that marriage is not just about love and

commitment but also about visibility and validation within a religious institution. Lastly, some participants view marriage as a tool for activism, advocating for the inclusion of bisexual and same-gender couples in religious ceremonies and considering how bisexual Christians who can marry in the Church might use their privilege to push for greater equality.

Whilst the discussions of marriage presented in this chapter are rich and emotionally charged, the data has certain limitations. Firstly, this chapter acknowledges that marriage has not been discussed in-depth with the LLF participants, which does limit developing a broader understanding of how marriage is perceived beyond the bisexual Christian community. The discussion within this chapter is also heavily centred on guilt, marginalisation, and institutional exclusion. While these are crucial themes, it may not fully capture moments of joy, acceptance, or alternative spiritual practices that affirm bisexual identities. However, it should be noted - and as is shown in Chapter 3 of this thesis - that marriage is a topic that the bisexual participants were particularly keen to raise themselves. There were no pre-set questions that created a platform in which guilt, marginalisation and exclusion would be highlighted. Instead, these topics rose naturally - and I would argue therefore emphasise the areas of marriage that these participants found particularly important to share. Further research focusing on how bisexuals of faith place meaning upon the concept of marriage would be fruitful, particularly in light of how attitudes to marriage, commitment, and family dynamics continue to change throughout generations. However, at this time, these considerations are outside the scope of this thesis.

6.5 Guilt

As mentioned earlier in this thesis (see Chapter 1), the CofE currently does not permit same-gender couples to marry and has only recently, as of the beginning of 2023, started to plan provisions in order to bless same-gender unions. Whilst marriage within a CofE church remains unattainable for

lesbian and gay Christians, there is a possibility for bisexual Christians to marry within a Church setting, if one is marrying a partner of another gender.

As this research data will show, for certain bisexual Christians, the aforementioned capability of choice can evoke feelings of guilt. Six of the nine bisexual participants interviewed stated feeling some form of guilt when considering marriage, whether it be for ‘betraying’ their identity and being a ‘bad bisexual’, or for lying to themselves, to the Church, and marrying under ‘false pretences’. These ideas will be explored further throughout this section. To consider the wider picture, I would argue that feelings of guilt are not uncommon for many bisexuals navigating the prospect of marriage, especially for those who wish to marry in a faith setting. These sentiments may be internal, manifesting as questioning whether one is staying true to oneself, or, within the context of churches such as the CofE, whether one is being ‘fair’ to lesbian and gay Christians. Externally, sources of guilt may stem from misconceptions about bisexuality, leading to inquiries about how an individual can actually enter a marriage, fuelled by incorrect assumptions of promiscuity or infidelity. This exploration of guilt among bisexual Christians when considering marriage highlights the concept of lived religion by demonstrating how faith is negotiated in everyday life, beyond formal doctrine. The internal and external tensions bisexual individuals experience, whether feeling they are ‘betraying’ their identity, marrying under ‘false pretences,’ or grappling with societal misconceptions, reflect the ways in which personal faith and institutional structures intersect. Rather than passively adhering to religious teachings, bisexual Christians actively navigate, reinterpret, and sometimes challenge these frameworks as they seek to reconcile their faith with their sexual identity. Their experiences illustrate how religious belief is not just shaped by doctrine but is continuously lived, adapted, and negotiated in response to personal, communal, and institutional dynamics.

6.5.1 The guilt of ‘straight privilege’

During her interview, Lauren disclosed that she was engaged to a man, and they were in the process of planning their wedding. Lauren expressed a keen awareness of the privilege afforded to her by marrying someone of another gender, and reflected on the distinct position she would occupy if she had chosen to marry someone of the same gender instead:

BC004: ‘There very easily could have been a version of me who’s fallen in love with someone else who was a woman, and I am now living this life which is a bit of like, I say I’ve taken the easy path, I’m allowed to get married in my home church and I don’t have to come out to anyone I don’t want to [...] I can just be a very straight passing Christian’ (lines 165 – 168, p. 6)

When considering her sexual orientation, I would argue that Lauren sees herself as standing at a fork in the road. One path offers her the opportunity to marry within the Church in which she worships; the other completely removes this option. When Lauren refers to taking the ‘easy’ path, she is commenting on her ability to ‘pass’ as heterosexual, an act which can have both positive and negative effects on a bisexual individual.

When a bisexual person is in a relationship with someone of the perceived opposite gender, they have a choice as to whether or not they should ‘disclose or conceal their sexual orientation’ (Bartholomay and Pendleton, 2023, p. 524). Bisexuals in mixed-gender relationships may use their heterosexual (or ‘straight’) ‘privilege’ to an advantage, as they may want or need to keep their identity private (Todd, Oravecz, and Vejar, 2016, p. 154). For those in other-gender relationships, utilising heterosexual privilege can create a safety net, allowing bisexual individuals to avoid unnecessary questions and comments. This privilege stems from heteronormativity which, according to Pollitt *et al* (2021, p. 522) and as noted within the literature review, is ‘defined as the presumption and privileging

of gender and conformity, heterosexuality, and nuclear families over all other “deviant” forms of gender expression, sexuality, and families’. Heteronormativity encourages society to see bisexuality as a phase, and in turn, to see mixed-gender relationships and marriages as ‘straight’, and same-gender relationships and marriages as ‘gay’, rendering bisexuality as totally invisible. McLean (2004, pp. 86 – 87) provides a famous example of this: ‘In an episode of *The Oprah Winfrey Show* in 1995, a statement by an audience member that she was bisexual and in a monogamous marriage was met by confusion by some other members of the audience. Trying to clarify the confusion, Oprah stated to the woman: ‘If you are bisexual, and you are married, and you are monogamous, you are not bisexual’.

Yet somehow, within the midst of a system which near aims to eradicate the bisexual identity, bisexuals are still able to gain a heterosexual privilege. Is this why bisexuals feel guilt, because they are able to somewhat gain from a system which is seemingly working so hard to ignore or diminish their identity? To allow us to return to Lauren’s quotation, let us consider the impact of this privilege and subsequent guilt on those within the Christian faith.

6.5.1a Hetero-privilege for bisexuals within Christian marriage

Whilst not present in all faiths, heteronormativity is still particularly present within Christianity. Henry (2017, p. 3) notes that there is much emerging research in the Republic of Ireland surrounding how Roman Catholic faith schools ‘have become implicated in regimes of normalcy that have legitimated heterosexual and cisgender identities’. Banks (2018, p. 8) argues that heteronormativity pervades Christian language when referring to the LGBT+ community; making specific references to LGBT+ individuals as “non-heterosexuals”, alongside ‘speaking of “acceptance”’ encourages heteronormative attitudes, as LGBT+ folk are seen as outside the norm and needing to be welcomed in. Heteronormativity is, unsurprisingly, particularly prevalent in Christian marriage discourse. In

2021, the Church of England published a Twitter advert encouraging engaged couples to consider a church wedding. The photograph accompanying this tweet showed an opposite-gender couple marrying in a Church space. Responses to the tweet flew in from those supportive of the LGBT+ community, commenting on how marriage is only possible within the Church if one is marrying a partner of the opposite gender, emphasising a heteronormative outlook from the CofE. LLF002 believed the advert to be ‘extraordinarily tone deaf [...], utterly insensitive’ (lines 201, 205, p. 7).

For bisexual Christians, especially those in the CofE, the influence of heteronormativity significantly shapes perceptions of marriage and one’s own positionality. Unfortunately, discussions or sermons in churches seldom address bisexuality; Garrigan (2009, p. 215) asks, ‘how are bisexual people represented in your church, if at all? Are bisexual people mis-portrayed as ‘straight’ if they are in a male-female relationship?’. This concern, as previously explored, holds particular relevance for bisexual Christians who grapple with identity challenges when contemplating marriage within a church setting. Acceptance of heteronormativity in familial contexts also poses challenges for some bisexual Christians when considering marriage. In Pollitt *et al’s* (2021, p. 535) study, one such bisexual participant, who had a Baptist mother and Catholic father, was told ‘you’re supposed to be with the opposite sex when you’re married and have kids’. This imposition of heteronormativity from the family unit may lead some bisexuals to forego a church marriage. Additionally, for those who have not disclosed their identity to their family or church community, heteronormativity may encourage them to keep their bisexuality concealed.

6.5.1b *The impact of ‘taking the easy path’*

During her interview, it was evident that Lauren did not harbour any sort of regret about choosing to get engaged to her husband-to-be. She spoke of him highly, the sign of a woman who was very much in love and was excited to plan the rest of her life with her partner. Yet in the back of her mind, Lauren realised that her heterosexual privilege, following the ‘easy path’, will allow her the option to marry in a church that may otherwise have rejected her:

BC004: ‘I can get married in that home church, which is a privilege that I wouldn’t have. And yeah, it did feel like a bit of a betrayal really, to book that church and say yeah, I’ll do it, because yeah, I did feel like there was this parallel universe where it’s just not fair’ (lines 168 – 171, pp. 6 – 7)

There is a noticeable lack of research specifically addressing bisexual experiences within the concept of Christian marriages. Consequently, the scope of our understanding is limited, and we are unable to gauge the extent to which Lauren’s comments, here considered in isolation, may resonate with other unrecorded bisexual Christian experiences. However, what we can begin to understand is that this guilt, exacerbated by heteronormative standards both within churches and wider society, is unique. For certain bisexual individuals, benefiting from heterosexual privilege entails having control over whether to disclose their identity to others; as Lauren states, ‘I don’t have to come out to anyone I don’t want to [...] I can just be a very straight passing Christian’ (BC004, lines 167 – 168, p. 6). Nathan, a participant in Bartholomay and Pendleton’s (2023, p. 530) study, acknowledged that ‘being married to a woman afforded [him] the option of choosing if he wanted to make his bisexual identity known to the public’. The participants in these two separate studies, through choosing a partner of another gender, were able to adopt a discretion to refrain from sharing their bisexuality.

Conversely, some bisexuals feel discomfort with the concept of heterosexual privilege (Hartman-Linck, 2014, p. 179) and choose not to conceal their identity. For others, identifying as lesbian or gay may be deemed easier or more effective as a means to sidestep heteronormative expectations (Scherrer, Kazyak, and Schmitz, 2015, p. 687). In Shepherd's (2019, pp. 101 - 102) research on bisexual Christian mental health, two participants shared how their heterosexual privilege could contribute to anxiety and a sense of alienation from the LGBT+ community. Martha expressed a desire to leverage her bisexual identity for advocating LGBT+ inclusion but felt hesitant, as being married to a man might make her feel like she is 'claiming a place' in a community where she perceives it is not available to her. Similarly, Des, a married man with a wife, experienced similar feelings, expressing anxiety about attending diversity meetings due to his heterosexual privilege.

The concept of lived religion – how individuals engage with, negotiate, and interpret religious practices in their daily lives – can provide further insight into these complexities. Lauren's experience is not just about formal theological doctrine, but the ways in which religious structures intersect with personal identity in lived practice. Within a lived religion framework, the act of marrying in a church is not merely a ritual but a negotiation of identity, belonging, and privilege. Lauren's feelings of betrayal stem from the awareness that she is engaging with a religious tradition that, in other circumstances, may have denied her access. Her ability to 'pass' as straight within a Church context exemplifies how bisexual Christians navigate their identities in ways that allow them to maintain participation in religious spaces while mitigating potential exclusion. Therefore, bisexual individuals may grapple with differing positions on whether to utilise their heterosexual privilege to simplify their lives. The scarcity of research examining the interplay between bisexuality, heterosexual privilege, and relationships or marriage within Christianity adds to the complexity of these dynamics. In Lauren's case, it might also be that 'passing' as straight is perceived as a more socially acceptable practice within

the church environment. Through the lens of lived religion, bisexual individuals' decisions to either conceal or reveal their identities are not just matters of personal preference but active negotiations of faith, community, and selfhood in religious spaces that continue to uphold heteronormative expectations.

In Lauren's interview, she did not explicitly state her church's attitudes towards the LGBT+ community. However, it could be speculated that, for her personally, utilising her heterosexual privilege may be safer or more acceptable than unnecessarily coming out as bisexual. Liefbroer and Rijken (2019, p. 364) posit that 'marriage is a living arrangement that is highly valued in Christian teaching,' and although attitudes toward marriage can vary across Christian denominations, some may attempt to 'exert considerable influence on institutional arrangements' such as divorce, cohabitation, or same-sex marriage (Liefbroer and Rijken, 2019, p. 365). As previously discussed, in Lauren's Christian denomination, the CoFE, marriage is traditionally considered a lifelong commitment between one man and one woman. If Lauren's church strongly adheres to this belief, her choice to 'pass' as heterosexual, to take the 'easy path', may be perceived as the most pragmatic path to take, even if she experiences a sense of conflict or guilt for being able to make this choice. This intersection of heteronormativity and lived religion is crucial in understanding the pressures bisexual Christians may face. Heteronormativity within religious institutions creates implicit and explicit expectations that reinforce traditional gender roles and relationships, making it more challenging for bisexual individuals to openly embrace their identity. Within a lived religion framework, bisexual Christians must navigate these expectations while maintaining their personal faith. For Lauren, remaining 'straight-passing' may not be a passive decision but rather an active response to the heteronormative pressures of her religious environment. Her engagement and forthcoming marriage within the Church may serve as both an affirmation of her faith and an uneasy reconciliation with the institutional structures that continue to marginalise queer

identities. As such, bisexual Christians often exist in a liminal space, balancing their commitment to faith with their personal truths in ways that reflect the lived realities of navigating heteronormative religious landscapes.

6.5.1c Personal presentation

Lauren's guilt also allows us to consider the personal presentation of bisexuals in the CofE. For example, when Lauren walks into a church space with her partner, do others look at her and wonder whether she is bisexual? Unless they are already somewhat aware of this, we could assume that the answer is no, they would not, as Lauren is female-presenting, and is walking into a church with someone who is male-presenting. Lauren more than likely presents in a heterosexual way, an image that would only be disturbed if she were to take a bisexual flag out of her pocket to wave at the congregation.

This concept of personal presentation leads us to Leah's interview. At the time of interview, Leah did not have a partner of any gender. She shared that she had previously been engaged to a man, had never been in a relationship with a woman, and did not necessarily see herself entering a same-gender marriage. Despite this, she was still attracted to women, and therefore identified as bisexual. Leah presented an interesting idea; she did not feel that she 'look[ed] gay', which she feels exacerbated her heterosexual privilege, and made her feel guilty:

BC007: 'I do feel a lot of guilt with that, and especially being bisexual, especially like, cis-presenting, I don't necessarily 'look' gay, you wouldn't sort of know, I don't know, if you saw me, so I do sort of feel like I have a lot of privilege when it comes to being in the Church compared to some other people in the community, especially when it comes to if I married a man' (lines 222 – 226, p. 8)

Leah expressed the belief that she does not appear ‘gay’, suggesting that she may not align with the stereotypical image associated with bisexual or queer women. Despite the absence of a specific appearance criterion for women in the LGBT+ community, Leah perceives herself as looking ‘straight’ enough to be presumed heterosexual. She argues that this assumption could be reinforced if she decides to marry a man. Within the LGBT+ community, establishing an identity holds significant importance. As noted by Hayfield (2013, p. 17), ‘shared visual identities [...] can be an intrinsic part of forming both individual identities and collective identities, which have historically been safe spaces away from a voyeuristic and homophobic gaze’. The emergence of LGBT+ spaces, social media engagement, and visual representations in film and television, have fostered the development of lesbian and gay identities. Consequently, these factors have given rise to a spectrum of stereotypes - both positive and negative - that contribute to the recognition of gay and lesbian individuals within heterosexual society. However, the scenario is different for the bisexual community. Hayfield (2013, p. 18) argues that ‘in stark contrast’ to the recognisable looks of ‘butch lesbians and effeminate gay men [...] no distinct set of appearance norms for bisexual people appear to have been recognised or acknowledged, if they indeed exist at all’. In a study of identity markers understood amongst students, Clarke and Turner (2007, p. 267) noted that, ‘by contrast, students typically identif[ied] a smaller number of associations for the word ‘bisexual’ (such as ‘confused’ and ‘greedy’) but have no clear image of the typical bisexual’. In a dichotomous society, it is no surprise that individuals fail to ‘recognise’ what may or may not constitute as a bisexual image. A lack of understanding surrounding bisexuality means that ‘there are no appearance signifiers that explicitly relate to a bisexual identity. Thus, bisexual individuals find themselves in a space where they have little to no bisexual-specific signs and appearance mandates that mark them out as people who find more than one gender attractive’ (Daly, King, and Yeadon-Lee, 2018, pp. 259 - 260).

So, what does this mean for bisexual women such as Leah, who do not ‘choose to adopt stereotypical lesbian appearance norms’ and are therefore ‘more likely to be misrepresented as heterosexual’ (Daly, King, and Yeadon-Lee, 2018, p. 258)?³⁴ Does she need to adopt a ‘bisexual display’, through the use of clothing or hairstyles (Hartman-Linck, 2014, p. 180)? What could constitute as a bisexual ‘look’, without necessarily relying on the stereotypes imposed on lesbians and gay men? Would looking more ‘gay’, to use Leah’s words, help her combat the guilt she feels in church because of the heterosexual privilege she believes is exacerbated through her outward appearance? In studies focusing on bisexual identity formation, some participants have found their own ways of visually presenting their bisexuality; Teresa, in order to publicly challenge the biersure she faced due to being married to a man, would choose to wear rainbows and the coloursof the bisexual flag to make her sexuality obvious. These presentations are known as ‘queer appearance markers’ (Bartholomay and Pendleton, 2023, p. 529). Participant Nathan had a ‘rainbow heart-shaped sticker on his laptop’ and would sometimes wear a ring or bracelet in the colours of the bisexual flag (Bartholomay and Pendleton, 2023, p. 530). Yes, it could be argued that stereotypes can be built from this, but ultimately, we could argue that the bisexual identity, or ‘look’, is fluid, and perhaps quite personal to the individual.

By not looking ‘gay’, does Leah feel she is engaging with her heterosexual privilege to the detriment of her community? Is she also conforming to a Christian expectation to look feminine? Is conforming to the Church’s heteronormative standards, and looking a certain way (therefore ‘succumbing’ to straight privilege) denying her bisexual identity? Leah was the only participant to note her appearance in relation to guilt. Whilst a minor point, I do believe that what Leah argues is interesting to consider. To what extent do we, as individuals, experience anxieties through howwe perceive our

³⁴ Leah, of course, does not have to present as a lesbian in order to be recognised as bisexual. However, I do think that this quotation is pertinent when we yet again consider the binaries that exist within society. In order for Leah to even be considered as bisexual, does she need to outwardly present in a homosexual way to be recognised?

physical appearance? Has the dichotomy of society encouraged us to create stereotypes, so that we can identify on what side of the fence individuals should fall? For bisexuals, whose identity is often ignored in both wider society and the Church, how can they present themselves, and make themselves visible, in a way that is both safe and accepting? Or, despite the guilt that they may feel, is it better to allow themselves to physically be ‘seen’ as either heterosexual or homosexual.

6.5.1d “Is it fair?”: Comparing oneself to others in the community

As we have explored through the eyes of Lauren and Leah, bisexual Christians who worship within the CofE are acutely aware of their ability to ‘pass’ as heterosexual, be it through choosing to marry a partner of another gender, or visually presenting in such a way that aligns with heterosexual norms. The guilt experienced by bisexual individuals due to the aforementioned factors is likely intensified by the sense that they may be inadvertently disadvantaging their lesbian and gay counterparts. Questioning ‘is it fair?’ that she has the option to marry within the CofE, whereas many of her friends and colleagues do not, Katie considers the impacts of her personal situation:

BC001: ‘I think, especially when we [Katie and her partner] started thinking about where we wanted to get married and if we wanted to get married in the Church of England, this was very much the question we were asking, like “is it fair?” that I get to marry you in this space when, had you been a woman, it just wouldn’t have been allowed and I felt so guilty about it, and I was just turning it over and over and over’ (lines 314 – 317, p. 10)

When interviewed, Katie shared that she and her partner had discussed their future, contemplating what it would signify for them to marry in the CofE. Given the opposite-gender dynamic of her relationship, Katie grappled with a sense of guilt concerning her fellow members of the LGBT+ community, who would not have the option to marry in Church if they chose a same-gender partner. Notably, when Katie confided in two colleagues – a gay man, and a lesbian, both Christian – their

responses differed markedly. Katie's gay male colleague encouraged her to confront and overcome her feelings of guilt, urging her to exercise her 'right' to marry in the CofE:

BC001: 'I sat down with one of my colleagues who's a gay man and has been with his, married to his husband for many years and I just said "Look, I feel so guilty about getting married in the Church, what do you think I should do?" and he turned to me and said "Don't feel guilty, the Church will do that for you, get married in the Church woman, it's your right"' (lines 317 – 321, pp. 10 – 11)

Whilst she felt fortified by these comments, her feelings of guilt were then further aggravated by her lesbian colleague, who opted to pinpoint Katie's heterosexual privilege:

BC001: 'I have a close friend, and also colleague, who's engaged and has been engaged to, she has been engaged to a woman for the last few years, and they've been waiting for the opportunity to get married in church and she has made several snide comments about my ability to pass as a straight person and everything else, and that sort of anxiety that I'm having what she would want, there's definitely [...] that sort of guilt, that, like, is this the right thing to do?' (lines 337 – 342, p. 11)

Research on the experiences of LGBT+ Christians in the context of religious marriages remains limited, potentially attributed to the rarity of same-gender marriages within Christian denominations, particularly in the Western Anglican world. Yip's (2004) study offers insights into how lesbian, gay, and bisexual Christians perceive the concept of same-gender marriage, but subsequent research growth has been minimal. Understanding why Katie's lesbian colleague reacted in a certain way is challenging, given the scarcity of growth in this area, but stating the obvious that she reacted in this way because Katie can marry within the Church, but she cannot. However, we could also consider that, when viewed through the lens of lived religion, Katie's experience illustrates the personal and relational struggles that arise from institutional structures. Whilst the question of whether Katie's guilt makes her feel less involved in the LGBT+ community was not directly addressed during the interview, it warrants

consideration. One could argue that her interactions with her lesbian colleague highlight existing biphobia within the LGBT+ community. Whilst ‘lesbian, gay and bisexual Christians continue to face the reality that their intimate relationships are a topic of incessant theological, religious and social debates’ (Yip, 2004, p. 173), Katie's experience suggests that, within the CofE, bisexual individuals are often overlooked by their gay and lesbian counterparts who perceive them as the ‘lucky ones’. Supporting this perspective, MacLeod *et al* (2015, p. 219) argues that ‘bisexual community activities note that some [...] (LGBT) community members believe that bisexuals are not committed to the LGBT community and take advantage of straight privilege’. Whilst Katie may not explicitly reference her heterosexual privilege, the narrative illustrates how such privilege can, again, evoke profound feelings of guilt for bisexual Christians within the Church.

6.5.1e Considering marriage in light of faith and sexuality

Within their interviews, both Lauren and Ruth examined the relationships that existed between their faith and their sexual identities, particularly in regard to the devoutness of their faith, and how this can impact their want to marry within the Church. Lauren’s guilt, discussed earlier in this chapter, is also apparent when she considers the strength of her own faith, alongside her husband’s lack of religious affiliation. Despite feeling as if she has grown away from the Church, and her husband having no Christian connection, they still have the opportunity to marry in the CofE:

BC004: ‘It’s another thing isn’t it, like that myself who has, you know, potentially grown a little bit away from faith over the last few years because of this pushback that I’ve had from the Church and him [their partner], who has never been Christian, we are allowed to get married in church, but two devout, hardcore, diehard Christian lesbians can’t’ (lines 190 – 193, p. 7)

Lauren’s quotation should be examined in light of the statement made by Mia, presented in isolation earlier in this chapter. Mia experienced distress as a result of her job, where she frequently

encountered scenarios requiring her to offer information about getting married in a CofE church to almost any couple somehow connected to the Church, even if they had not worshipped within the organisation, or did not necessarily identify as Christian. As a devout Christian, and a bisexual, Mia was troubled to see that as long as a couple were heterosexual, even those with the weakest ties to the Church could still marry in one of its spaces. Therefore, as a Christian with faltering faith, and a husband that is not Christian himself, Lauren expressed her guilt that, due to previous ties to the Church, she was still able to marry within one of its spaces, yet a more devout same-gender couple would be denied this opportunity. Mia and Lauren's experiences reveal the disparity between the Church of England's formal policies on marriage and the personal religious commitments of its members. Mia's distress stems from the inconsistency in how marriage eligibility is determined – not by the depth of a couple's faith but by their heterosexuality, suggesting that institutional religion prioritises certain social structures over personal belief and devotion. Lauren's guilt further underscores this point. Despite her own faith struggles and her husband's lack of belief, her marriage within the Church was permitted because of technical ties, whereas a deeply religious same-gender couple would be excluded. This illustrates how some individuals may have to negotiate religious identity beyond institutional boundaries, often leading to moral dilemmas and emotional conflict when institutional policies fail to align with personal convictions.

The CofE provides data statistics for church attendance. The most recent reports are from 2021, which would provide a skewed image of church attendance in the CofE due to the Covid-19 pandemic. However, the 2021 census for England and Wales – which was sent to all households and would have been completed regardless of the ongoing threat of Covid-19 – showed that 'for the first time in a census of England and Wales, less than half of the population (46.2%, 27.5 million people) described themselves as "Christian"' (Office for National Statistics, 2022). The second most common response

was “‘No religion” [...] increasing by 12.0 percentage points to 37.2% (22.2 million) from 25.2% (14.1 million) in 2011’ (ONS, 2022)³⁵. To examine these statistics simply, it is quite obvious that religion is in decline; and yet for those who chose ‘no religion’ on the ONS census but perhaps their grandmother worships in the local church, or even for those who chose Christianity, not perhaps for their own affiliations, but because they come from a Christian family, or choose to worship twice a year, for these individuals, these small tethers are enough to ‘tick the box’ for a church wedding.

Lauren stated in her interview that she stepped back from her Christian community due to a pushback from individuals in her church, although she did not elaborate on what this meant. For other LGBT+ Christians, they may choose to leave faith groups, or worship spiritually in their private time as opposed to institutionally, due to feeling neglected in church, that they cannot express their identity, or face microinvalidations (Wood and Conley, 2014). Perhaps this is why Lauren encountered a faltering of faith, as she grappled with the complexities that existed between her religion and her sexual identity. Yet despite this questioning, despite her declining faith, and despite her husband’s lack of faith, Lauren’s previous affiliations still allow her to proceed with a church wedding, and she contends with genuine guilt over this situation.

Ruth experiences similar feelings to Lauren, although arguably exists at the opposite end of the spectrum. When speaking to Ruth, it was obvious that she was a very devout Christian, and she spoke very deeply and passionately about her faith; she cares ‘very, very much about’ her religious identity, as stated below, and despite infrequently attending church as a child, still felt ‘very connected to my [her] own faith’ (line 16, p. 1). Ruth shared that she had experienced some internal conflict with her

³⁵ The national census does not comment on denominations specifically, therefore we do not know to what extent those who identify as Christian were referring to the Church of England.

faith and sexual identities, but despite this continues to regard her faith seriously, including taking steps to involve herself more in the life of her church. Ruth is aware that if she was dating a woman instead of a man, her Christian life would be very different. She understands how her so-called ‘straight side’ can privilege her:

BC006: ‘In terms of like, with gay or bisexual people, I find it really unfair because I go to church, you know, I take my faith very seriously and all that, and I even volunteered, this is a big step for me, I even volunteered to do Sunday school with them now even though I’m worried about if people find out that I’m bisexual, and yet if my boyfriend was a woman, I would not even be able to get married or have a blessing in a church that I have followed for you know, quite some time now and that I care very, very, very much about’ (lines 336 - 231,p. 6)³⁶

Ruth appears to contend that it is unjust for her sexual identity to potentially overshadow the significance of her faith in the context of marriage. Expressions of this nature lead us to consider: for bisexual Christians, how do they navigate the decision between the importance of marrying within their faith or prioritising their love for a specific individual? Whilst some bisexual Christians may find accepting and affirming faith communities that celebrate both their sexual identity and their commitment to their partner, others may grapple with the tension between their faith tradition and same-gender attraction, or ‘want’ for a same-gender relationship. In such cases, some individuals may need to weigh their personal beliefs, values, and priorities to make a decision that aligns with their sense of identity and spirituality. I would argue that for the bisexual Christian community, there is no universal solution, and navigating these complexities will produce unique challenges for each individual. I hold a similar conviction that, as long as the Church of England remains unaware of the challenges and complexities experienced by bisexual individuals, there will be no effective support for those grappling with the intersection of their faith and sexual identities. This will continue to leave bisexual Christians

³⁶ Ruth was interviewed before the Church of England’s decision in 2023 to bless same-sex unions.

in a state of uncertainty, unsure of how or when they may reconcile these aspects of their lives in the context of marriage.

6.6 Grappling with the validity of marriage, and the want to marry in church

Some Christians may opt for a church ceremony when getting married, whilst others may not. For those who place significant importance on the sacrament of marriage and its deep connection to faith, having the ceremony in a sacred space before God is a compelling choice. On the contrary, some Christians may decide against a church wedding due to their partner's lack of religious affiliation, or for the convenience of hosting both the wedding ceremony and reception in a single location. It is worth noting that individuals who are not Christian might also choose to marry in a church. Their reasons could range from a desire to incorporate God into their relationship as they explore faith, to familial traditions of marrying where relatives have, or selecting a local church in their hometown for sentimental or aesthetic reasons.

Certain participants within this research study faced a distinctive dilemma when contemplating a church wedding and the overall status of their marriage. They found themselves questioning whether adhering to the requirement of marrying a partner of another gender for a church ceremony was genuinely crucial to them, or if they were content with a civil ceremony. One such participant was Mia. At the time of interview, Mia was planning her wedding with her partner, and had found a way in which to incorporate faith into her same-gender ceremony. She and her partner were choosing to marry in a licensed venue, with a friend – a Methodist minister – conducting the ceremony. At the time, Mia stated that 'it might actually end up being a blessing rather than an actual marriage ceremony, but the main focus of our day will be that religious service' (BC002, lines 256 – 258, p. 9).

By choosing to wed outside of the CofE, despite worshipping within it, Mia found a way to embrace her sexuality yet still incorporate her religion into her wedding day. Her navigation of the complexities of marrying a partner of the same gender in a religious setting should not go unnoticed; even as LGBT+ acceptance continues to rise, there are still many individuals and institutions that do not support same-gender couples. Small (2018, p. 221) notes that, in the United States, a pizza restaurant in Indiana denied catering a same-sex wedding, and in Colorado, a bakery refused to bake a wedding cake for a same-sex couple. When considering a wedding venue, these navigations continue, especially if the couple in question wish to marry in a religious space. Before the introduction of laws that would allow same-gender marriages, in many nations, some churches would still provide a service for same-gender couples; however, ‘the absence of any state- sanctioned recognition of these couples meant that the church ceremonies were purely symbolic, religious events and understandably left a bitter-sweet taste of incompleteness in the mouths of many’ (Bethmont, 2023, pp. 492 – 493). Whilst other Anglican denominations have now closed the divide between civil same-sex marriages and religious ceremonies, conducting same-sex ceremonies in church spaces, Bethmont (2023, p. 493) argues that ‘although this regime of imposed, multiple celebratory events disappeared in the American and Scottish Episcopal Churches when they changed their marriage canons in 2015 and 2017 respectively, it remains the rule in the Church of England’. Mia stated in her interview that although faith is not an important element in her partner’s life, as it is important to Mia, it is therefore important to her partner (BC002, line 268, p. 9); they have therefore made a conscious effort to find ways to incorporate faith into their wedding day, despite Mia’s church institution still not offering marriage ceremonies to same-gender couples.

Mia’s experience exemplifies how individuals actively shape and reinterpret religious practices to align with their personal beliefs, relationships, and societal constraints. By choosing to wed outside

the Church of England whilst still incorporating faith into her wedding, Mia demonstrates how people navigate religious traditions in ways that are personally meaningful. This reflects the creative and sometimes subversive ways individuals maintain their spiritual identity when religious institutions fail to accommodate their lived realities. Instead of rejecting faith altogether due to the Church of England's exclusionary stance, Mia adapts her religious practice to affirm both her faith and her sexuality. Moreover, her partner's willingness to honour faith despite not being religious themselves highlights how lived religion can extend beyond individual belief; it is relational and shaped by social dynamics. Their decision to integrate faith into the wedding reflects a broader pattern where couples, particularly those in same-gender relationships, must carefully negotiate religious and social spaces to ensure their love and commitment are recognised in ways that are spiritually fulfilling. Mia's story also echoes broader historical and cultural shifts, as seen in Bethmont's discussion of same-gender religious ceremonies being purely symbolic before legal recognition. Whilst other Anglican branches have adapted, the Church of England's continued restrictions force individuals like Mia to find alternative, deeply personal ways to practice their faith.

6.6.1 When faith outweighs attraction?

Throughout this chapter so far, we have seen that faith plays a more pivotal role in some participants' lives than others. For certain participants, the significance of marrying in a church space, and marrying in a Church that means so much to them and their faith, would potentially affect whether they chose to marry someone of the same, or another gender.

Eve emphasises the significance of faith in a prospective future marriage, yet she clarifies that she would not necessarily pursue a heterosexual relationship solely for the purpose of getting married:

BC003: 'I don't feel like I could necessarily, for me, marriage wouldn't be valid unless it was in church [...] I couldn't get married, I don't think, in a registry office, I think it would be the case that if I did end up with a woman, I wouldn't, I might marry them, but for me it wouldn't be a marriage, unless it was kind of, happened in a church with, you know, the invocation of God and that kind of thing [...] If I can't have a marriage in faith, then, I don't really want a marriage. I don't know whether I would actively seek a relationship, a heterosexual relationship, in order to get married' (lines 129, 130 – 133, 136 – 138, p. 5)

Reflecting on this comment alone, I would argue, shows that Eve is very dedicated to her faith.

However, once again we return to the theme of guilt for bisexual Christians; to what extent, perhaps, does Eve feel a sense of guilt to conform to the rules and regulations of the Church, even if those roles do not necessarily align with the desires of someone in a long-term committed relationship, who also identifies as bisexual? Nevertheless, other research indicates that religion can play a significant role in the lives of Christians, including those in the LGBT+ community, when deciding to marry. Murr's (2013, pp. 360 - 361) study involved a variety of research participants, such as JoAnn, who emphasised the importance of marrying in church. She states, 'I was going to be married. I wasn't not going to be married in church. For me, that felt important to me, to have a God presence there in my marriage, for my marriage' (pp. 360 - 361). Further studies have shown that religiosity positively influences relationship values, marital quality, and overall marital stability (Lakatos and Martos, 2019, p. 262). Therefore, although to an extent Eve may feel some guilt for her choices due to her sexual identity - she later describes herself as a 'bad bisexual' (BC003, line 140, page 5), it is not surprising that LGBT+ religious individuals, despite certain institutional setbacks or questions of identity, may be inclined to incorporate their faith into the marriage process.

Leah experiences similar emotions to Eve. Her faith is important to her, and in interview she stated that although she could not imagine choosing *not* to marry in the CofE, she appreciated the complications that come with potentially wanting to marry someone of the same gender:

BC007: '[I've] always wanted to get married in church and marriage is a very religious thing for me, and I don't ever, I couldn't really imagine not getting married in church. But then if that was taken away from me if I was marrying a woman, I guess I wouldn't have much choice. It's a little bit complicated' (lines 194 – 197, p. 7)

Leah's use of the phrase '[not having] much choice' underscores the ongoing challenges that bisexual Christians are grappling with within the CofE. Love and relationships often unfold unexpectedly, and one might find themselves falling in love with someone they never anticipated meeting, let alone building a relationship with. For bisexual individuals, the capacity to develop romantic feelings for individuals of various gender identities may lead them to desire marriage and a shared life with someone of a different gender. However, for those like Leah, who are a part of the CofE, this awareness brings forward a poignant realisation of the choices they may confront, and the potential impact on both their faith and their relationship.

Danielle, cares deeply for her faith and, like Eve and Leah, would like to marry in the Church of England. However, she does not believe that the Church's attitude is fair, and because of this, would not want to marry in the CofE unless she could marry 'as herself':

BC008: ‘I feel like unless they would marry me for me, like, as me, it would be a bit disingenuous to get married in the Church of England, and I think until I could marry a woman with as much ease as I could marry a man, I wouldn’t want to get married in the Church’ (lines 265 – 267, p. 10)

Jessica, whose partner at the time of interview identified as non-binary, expressed similar feelings to Danielle, arguing that she would not want to marry in the Church whilst she felt she would be marrying under ‘false pretences’ (BC005, line 229, p. 7). Whilst Jessica’s comment does not directly link to the argument of choosing faith over sexuality, it does emphasise that bisexual Christians must continuously contend which side of their identity may be more important; does faith overshadow sexuality when considering marriage, or does sexuality overshadow faith? When interviewing the *LLF* participants, LLF005 made a compelling statement for how the Church needs to change, stating that until bisexuals feel welcome in every Church of England church, the Church will not be a welcoming environment to the bisexual community. Let us consider this alongside Danielle and Jessica’s comments, and ask: how can the CofE become a more welcoming and accepting space for bisexuals to marry, so that they do not have to consistently question their identity, and their place at the marriage table? How can bisexual Christians who choose to marry a partner of the opposite gender or another gender identity, such as non-binary, combat their guilt, so that they can still feel if they are marrying as themselves – ‘marry[ing] me for me’, as Danielle quotes, and not marrying under ‘false pretences’, to quote Jessica, in order to feel comfortable marrying in Church?

Jessica’s and Danielle’s experiences highlight how lived religion and heteronormativity shape the struggles of bisexual Christians in the Church of England, particularly when considering marriage. Lived religion is not just about institutional doctrine but about how individuals navigate faith in real-world contexts, and for bisexual Christians, this often means questioning whether they are truly seen

within their religious community. Whilst the Church allows them to marry an opposite-gender partner, this acceptance frequently comes at the cost of erasing their bisexuality, reinforcing the Church's heteronormative framework. Jessica's concern about marrying under 'false pretences' reflects the broader issue that bisexual individuals are only fully acknowledged when they conform to heterosexual expectations. LLF005's statement underscores the need for a more inclusive Church – one that recognises bisexuality as a valid identity, acknowledges non-binary partners, and creates spaces where bisexual Christians can fully embrace both their faith and sexuality without compromise. Until these changes occur, bisexual Christians will continue to struggle with whether they can truly 'marry as themselves' within the Church of England, rather than feeling pressured to conform to institutional norms in order to belong.

6.7 Looking forward: Considerations for how the Church of England can progress

Bisexual individuals frequently find themselves at a crossroads when navigating the intersection of faith and sexual identity, often 'ostracised from gay communities and, like lesbians and gay men, [...] excluded from religious communities' (Toft, 2014, p. 548). Bisexual Christians may grapple with the need to conceal aspects of their identity to assimilate into specific spaces, be it within LGBT+ or Christian communities. However, this concealment can result in a profound sense of incompleteness or a lack of belonging. It places bisexual Christians in a challenging position where accessing certain spaces may feel like a compromise or even a betrayal of one facet of their identity in favour of the other.

6.7.1 What, ultimately, does this mean for bisexuals? Considering betrayal

As this chapter has shown, marriage stands out as a significant factor that can introduce confusion and necessitate compromise, prompting a re-evaluation of priorities for bisexual Christians,

particularly those within the CofE. The dilemma arises: should one adhere strictly to their faith and marry someone of a different gender to ensure a church-sanctioned marriage, or does this decision feel like a betrayal of a fundamental aspect of their identity? Lauren felt this betrayal within herself when considering marrying within the Church of England, feeling that she was compromising her bisexuality:

BC004: 'I did have a bit of a wobbly about getting married in my church, because I felt like I was betraying a part of me' (lines 163 – 164, p. 6)

Why is the environment in the CofE such that bisexuals feel, by marrying someone of another gender, that they are betraying their bisexuality? What wider factors contribute to these feelings? Earlier in this chapter, it was considered that heteronormativity, a societal mindset which only exacerbates apparent bisexual 'straight privilege', encourages a person's bisexuality to no longer be visible if they marry someone of another gender. Indeed, the permanent state of marriage, for many bisexuals, seems 'to be the main factor that convinced the friends of bi+ people in that their bi+ identities were no longer valid' (Bartholomay and Pendelton, 2023, p. 527). It is no wonder, therefore, that bisexual Christians may feel that by marrying a partner of another gender in a church space, that they are betraying their bisexual identity, ultimately rendering it invisible. Alongside these feelings of betrayal, many bisexuals after often made to feel as if their sexuality is 'bad or wrong' and are offered limited 'levels of support or understanding of [their] sexuality' (Taylor *et al.*, 2019, p. 139), factors which I argue could only be exacerbated by a Christian environment that lacks understanding.

6.7.2 What, ultimately, does this mean for bisexuals? Considering heartbreak

This chapter has also shown the heartbreak that bisexual Christians experience when considering marriage within the CofE. Returning to our analogy of the path, some bisexuals feel guilty

for choosing a partner of another gender, therefore securing the ability to marry within a Church space. For others, their choices or attractions may mean that this is never an option, or at least, not until the Church changes its mind. Is it no wonder that bisexuals feel such heartache, when all options only encourage questioning, confusion, and sadness? Jessica's heart breaks at the thought of potentially being unable to ever marry in a Church so important to her, whilst same-gender marriage is still unavailable to CofE worshippers:

BC005: 'I love weddings so much, I think they're such a beautiful thing, not just for the sort of like tradition of it, like I think of it as a way of involving God in your relationship as well, and it's not just for me like a fun little party, it genuinely is like an important religious thing for me as well, and it makes me really, really sad that I might not be able to get married in the Church of England' (lines 216 – 219, p. 6)

Why should bisexuals who wish to involve God in their relationship, and who are dedicated to the CofE, have to turn elsewhere? Why should devout bisexuals who wish to marry a partner of the same gender feel rejected by their Church, when so many other denominations have opened their arms and their doors in this way?

6.7.3 What, ultimately, does this mean for bisexuals? A want for change

Throughout her interview, Ruth shared some very personal experiences, including that she often struggled to build a relationship between her sexuality and religious identity. This was exacerbated by her relationship with her boyfriend, as she was acutely aware of her heterosexual privilege. Despite these struggles, Ruth declared that she was keen to use her privilege to fight for the rights of her fellow LGBT+ Christians:

BC006: 'If I did get married in a church, I still want to make that commitment, and if I'm able to, if I'm lucky to do that, I want to be able to honour it and I would always keep trying to campaign so that other people can have what I would be able to do [...] I want to always try and campaign for same-sex marriage to be allowed. That is something that I want to do now, I've

decided, kind of in the future’ (lines 297 – 299, 295 – 296, p. 8)

As has been argued throughout this chapter, there is limited research into the relationship between bisexuality, Christianity, and marriage, particularly in the CofE. I believe that the participants in this study have given an enlightening insight into the confusions and complexities that bisexual Christians in the Church face, and how this can deeply impact their feelings about the marriage process. The CofE is an institution that is yet to publicly change its stance on bisexuality, meaning that in the interim, bisexuality will always be seen as a promiscuous, misunderstood identity by many within the Church. As long as the Church continues on its current trajectory, Ruth believes that the CofE will continue to be homophobic by not allowing same-gender marriages, no matter what may be published or shared:

BC006: ‘I used to think the Church of England was just trying to reconcile themselves with what the Bible says and how they feel in a modern society, but now I’m realising actually, as long as the Church continues to not allow gay marriage, it will always be institutionally homophobic no matter what’s happening’ (lines 245 – 249, p. 7)

Whilst bisexuals should not have to be the voice of the fight for same-gender marriage in the CofE purely because of their privilege, Ruth’s comments provide us with a step forward. Through an infiltration of the Church’s system, bisexuals have the ability, due to their capacity to marry in the CofE, to provide a voice for those who the Church may continue to render voiceless. However, it is vital to recognise that bisexuals deserve the right of same-gender marriages as much as their lesbian and gay counterparts and should not allow the CofE to guilt bisexuals into other-gender marriages, erasing their identities in the process. I would argue that it is becoming increasingly obvious that the CofE still has a lack of understanding as to what bisexuality actually is, and the complications that bisexuals may face when considering marriage within its institution. As Bartholomay and Pendleton (2023, p. 523)

argue, ‘the evolving and expanding definitions of gender and sexuality do not cleanly fit within the historical definition of marriage’.

When considering the above point, it is important to remember that there are many who will have, as Bartholomay and Pendleton state, a historical definition of marriage within which their morals and values are placed. Whilst, as noted earlier in this chapter, there does not appear to be a ‘set’ definition of marriage within the CofE per se, some within the CofE believe – as LLF001 informs – that allowing same-gender marriage would ‘be to change the definition of marriage. That would be problematic because that would be [...], regardless of what you think about that theologically, that would kind of be a break with tradition’ (lines 26-28, pp. 1-2). Even with this in mind, I argue that the experiences shared within this chapter stress that until the CofE takes the time to develop its understanding of non-monosexual identities, including bisexuality, and how marriage can be a convoluted and confusing process for them to face, then sadly bisexuals will continue to experience guilt, pressure, and invisibility when considering marriage in the Church of England.

Chapter 7

Concluding thoughts: Looking to a hopeful future, and considering what is next for bisexuals in the Church of England

In the introduction to this thesis, Rev. Mae Christie questioned how, despite a 2017 call to ban conversion therapy, *Issues in Human Sexuality* could still recommend conversion therapy for the bisexual community. In response, the Bishop of London stated that *Issues* does not call for conversion therapy but recognises that past failings of the Church – including *Issues* – are the reason why the *Living in Love and Faith* process was embarked upon. As of 2024, has the Church of England found a way forward? Arguably, as shown through bisexual participant comments within this thesis, *LLF* is certainly not the ‘way forward’ that the CofE envisioned it to be. In fact, the *LLF* process as a whole has generally failed to provide for the LGBT+ community, particularly bisexuals. In the February 2024 Synod discussions, *LLF* has consistently been used as an empty phrase or term, to describe communities which empty language fails to recognise (Student Christian Movement, 2024). When we consider the bisexual community as a unique entity, apologies for the language in Section 5.8 of *Issues* are still, yet to be received. So how can the CofE move forward for bisexuals?

It seems most fitting to return to an idea presented by [LLF005](#) that has been noted frequently throughout this thesis: they state that until the CofE is a space in which bisexuals are able to feel wholly and unequivocally welcome and affirmed in every Church, then the CofE cannot say that it is a welcoming space for bisexuals. Whilst there is not a ‘one size fits all’ approach to creating a welcoming and affirming CofE community for bisexuals, I argue that this research study has provided a valuable and rich insight through lived experience data into some of the core issues that bisexuals within the Church face, and in turn, has considered how these issues can be tackled, and how Church communities

can find a path forward.

As a reminder, the triangulation concept noted within the introduction to this thesis states this research aims to examine the disparity between bisexual Christian lived experience and the way bisexuality is represented in Church of England publications and policies. This three-part relationship – of the lived experiences of bisexual Christians within the Church, the official documentation and policies that define the Church’s stance on bisexuality, and the perspectives of policy makers who influence or create these documents – has been analysed to focus upon particular gaps, including a lack of bisexual voice in lived spaces and policies. Various conclusions have been reached, but perhaps most markedly, this research has shown that bisexual Christians feel unwelcomed within certain Church of England communities, and they do not feel that unequivocal space exists for them to flourish as their authentic selves. They do not feel that their questions and emotions on marriage are truly heard, nor do they feel that the Church’s language used in certain policies and publications is acceptable, or representative of the lived experiences of bisexual Christians. This sentiment is also shared by the *Living in Love and Faith* participants, and accompanies their understandings of the lack of bisexual support within the Church, and that bisexuality fails to reign as a key focal point within academic and clerical conversations within the Church of England.

This final chapter will examine to what extent the research aims of this study were achieved, how this research contributes to the wider fields of theology and sexuality, to what extent the theoretical frameworks were employed, and considerations for future research. Throughout this chapter, it will be contemplated how Church of England communities can aim to find their way forward, particularly in welcoming and affirming, and creating spaces, for the bisexual community.

7.1 Achieving the research aims of this study

The aims of this research study were as follows:

RS1: To provide a voice for bisexual Christians through the use of qualitative, semi- structured interviews, subsequently followed by an interpretative phenomenological data analysis (IPA), in order to platform the unique challenges that bisexual Christians face.

RS2: To gain an insight through further qualitative, semi-structured interviews (and data analysis using IPA) with academics and clergy involved in the CofE's *LLF* project, of what the perspectives and proposed strategies of policymakers and publication contributors are surrounding bisexuality within the Church, and in turn, what those involved in these processes believe can be done to enhance the experiences of bisexuals within the CofE.

RS3: Through these interview processes, and accompanying literature analysis, to develop knowledge of how Christian and bisexual identities can intersect and influence each other, and ultimately, disseminate guidance on how to provide safe and inclusive spaces at a parish level that begin to understand and champion bisexual identities.

7.1.1 'To provide a voice for bisexual Christians through the use of qualitative, semi-structured interviews...'

The first research statement has been met through the application of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) within the broader triangulation framework, ensuring that the lived experiences of bisexual Christians are placed at the forefront. By conducting qualitative, semi-structured interviews, this study has engaged deeply with personal narratives, capturing the intersection

of faith and sexuality beyond doctrinal confines. The concept of lived religion has been instrumental in illuminating how bisexual Christians practice their faith in contrast to institutional recognition or erasure. Through IPA, participants' voices reveal patterns of resilience and adaptation, highlighting both the personal and communal dimensions of faith that are often overlooked in Church policies. This approach has not only given voice to bisexual Christians but has also provided a richer, more nuanced understanding of their spiritual and social challenges within the Church of England.

7.1.2 'To gain an insight [...] with those involved in the *LLF* project...'

The second research statement is addressed through an examination of Church policies and semi-structured interviews with policymakers and clergy involved in the CofE's *LLF* project. Heteronormativity serves as a critical theoretical framework in this analysis, revealing the extent to which bisexuality is marginalised or acknowledged in institutional discourse. By assessing the perspectives of policymakers and their engagement with bisexuality, this study critically evaluates whether Church policies perpetuate exclusionary narratives or are evolving to embrace more inclusive understandings. The triangulation method has been vital in juxtaposing these institutional perspectives with lived experiences, uncovering discrepancies between policy intent and its real-world impact on bisexual Christians. This comparative approach ensures that policy discussions are not detached from the realities of bisexual parishioners, thereby offering insight into potential pathways for enhancing their inclusion within the CofE.

7.1.3 'Intersect and influence...'

The third research statement has been fulfilled through the integration of literature analysis and interview findings, ultimately contributing to a deeper understanding of how Christian and bisexual

identities intersect. Queer theory and bisexual theory have been crucial in deconstructing the binary frameworks that shape institutional policies and theological discussions within the CofE. These frameworks expose the erasure of bisexuality in religious discourse and offer a lens through which inclusive theological practices can be explored. By engaging with the perspectives of both bisexual Christians and Church policymakers, this study identifies key gaps in institutional recognition and provides practical recommendations for creating safe and affirming parish environments. The triangulation approach strengthens these findings by ensuring that lived experiences, policy frameworks, and academic discourse are examined holistically, fostering a dialogue that moves toward meaningful inclusion of bisexual identities within the Church.

7.2 Contribution to the field

Continual advancements in research play a pivotal role in expanding areas of knowledge, offering fresh perspectives and novel findings that can deepen our understandings of a discipline. The literature gaps noted earlier in this thesis confirmed that research into the field of bisexual Christianity is far from complete and thorough, and I argue that my research has contributed to the fields of theology and sexuality by foregrounding bisexual Christian experiences, a perspective often overlooked in both academic and ecclesiastical discourse. Unlike previous studies that subsume bisexuality under broader LGBT+ experiences, this study highlights its distinct challenges, particularly within the CofE. The research triangulates lived experiences, church policies, and policy-maker perspectives to reveal discrepancies between institutional narratives and the realities of bisexual Christians. This research has highlighted certain realities: language within Church policy does not reflect the lived experience of bisexual people, there is little to no bisexual-specific support within the CofE and bisexual spaces are uncommon, and marriage is a concept where bisexual voices are often ignored.

The participants in this study have shown that an encouragement of active allyship for bisexuals, and an overall better understanding of bisexuality, would provide vital support networks for those in the bisexual Christian community. Moving forward, this is something that the Church truly needs to consider as part of its ‘development of understanding’ about bisexuality; I believe that the guidance document created from my data will support this development of understanding at a grassroots level. Through the unseen reading task with the bisexual participants, and discussions of the impacts of language with the *LLF* participants, I further argue that my research has provided a personal element to studies of Christian policy texts, an angle that has not been taken before. I consider this to be a significant piece of new research, one which could arguably encourage CofE communities to actively choose how they engage with dated and misunderstood language that exists within documents. Finally, by discussing bisexual Christian attitudes to marriage, especially within the CofE, I argue that my research has shown the importance of marriage to this particular community and the guilt, stresses, and pressures that bisexual Christians feel. I contend that this research can provide considerations for Church communities on how bisexual Christians who wish to marry can be supported, for example through education, understanding, and offers of counselling or support.

7.3 Concluding thoughts

The purpose of this thesis has been to provide a comprehensive, research-driven exploration of the lived experiences of bisexual Christians within the Church of England, and how these experiences intersect with, or are shaped by, the Church’s policies and publications on bisexuality. By employing a triangulated approach that integrates lived religion, heteronormativity, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, and queer and bisexual theory, this study ensures a multi-faceted understanding of bisexual Christians’ challenges and resilience. The CofE must now recognise the harm caused to the bisexual community, particularly through exclusionary language and policy

omissions, and take seriously the voices of those who have shared their experiences. This study has provided a platform for bisexual Christians through qualitative, semi-structured interviews, explored institutional perspectives through discussions with academics and clergy, and critically examined the intersection of Christian and bisexual identities. Ultimately, this research aims to bridge the gap between the lived realities of bisexual Christians and the policymaking processes that shape their inclusion, or exclusion, within the Church.

This thesis engages with the 2023 comments made by the House of Bishops, in which apologies were issued for a lack of understanding of bisexuality, asexuality, and gender fluidity, alongside promises to improve engagement with these identities. However, the practical steps necessary to fulfil these promises have yet to materialise. This inaction suggests that the Church may be uncertain about how to embark on a journey toward genuine understanding. This study contends that bisexuality, as explored through IPA and triangulated against Church policies and policymaker perspectives, can serve as a focal point for broader inclusivity efforts. The research findings highlight several key initiatives necessary to deepen institutional understanding and foster a more inclusive environment for bisexual Christians within the CofE:

- Through language: The Church must move beyond performative apologies and engage in meaningful dialogue with bisexual Christians to ensure that its language is inclusive, precise, and affirming. The heteronormative framework embedded in Church literature, particularly in texts like *Issues in Human Sexuality*, continues to marginalise bisexual identities. Until the Church actively consults bisexual individuals about how they are represented and revises outdated documents, its statements will lack credibility. Acknowledging and addressing bisexual erasure within Church doctrine is critical to ensuring that institutional discourse

reflects lived experiences rather than reinforcing monosexual assumptions.

- **Through space:** The creation of safe, affirming spaces for bisexual Christians within the CofE is essential. Queer and bisexual theory critique the binary structures that dominate religious spaces, highlighting the need for environments where bisexual individuals feel fully welcomed. Whether these spaces exist within traditional church settings or in alternative Anglican worship environments, the Church must take active steps to assess its inclusivity. The triangulated analysis of lived experiences, policy discourse, and institutional perspectives underscores the necessity of fostering congregational settings that move beyond passive acceptance toward active affirmation of bisexual identities. Churches that wish to become more inclusive must critically evaluate their practices and implement tangible steps to enhance bi-inclusivity within their communities.
- **Through marriage:** The Church's engagement with the bisexual community must extend to an inclusive understanding of marriage, which remains a site of tension for many bisexual Christians. IPA reveals that bisexual individuals often experience unique dilemmas in reconciling their faith with societal and ecclesiastical expectations of relationships. Rather than assuming that offering blessings for LGBT+ individuals is sufficient, the Church must adopt a lived religion approach by incorporating bisexual perspectives into marriage counselling and pastoral care. By recognising the complexities bisexual Christians face in both choosing a life partner and integrating their sexual and spiritual identities, the Church can develop more meaningful, tailored support structures.

One of the *LLF* participants interviewed for this study stated that they knew of a bisexual individual who was ‘hiding in plain sight’. I believe this is the case for many, if not all, bisexual Christians within the Church of England. In a church that has made little to no effort until very recently to, at least claim to, understand the bisexual community, it is no wonder that bisexual Christians feel unaffirmed, unwelcomed, and out of place within Anglican contexts. It is unfair that the bisexual community often face an internal conflict between their faith and sexual identity, and more often than not have to ‘hide’ their ‘confusing’ and misunderstood sexual identity, allowing others to see them as hetero- or homosexual for sake of ease. The Church of England has a choice, moving forward. An active and open statement has been made by the Bishops of the Church; a promise that they will do better, a promise that they will develop their understandings of the bisexual community. Will this be done? Perhaps it is too soon to tell. However, for a community that is still to this day seen as promiscuous, as ambiguous, as confused about who they are, the Church, now more than ever, needs to trigger a scheme of motions which will truly welcome bisexuals into the Church, which will change language and attitudes, and create a space in which bisexual Christians can truly flourish, and be open, and be happy, within the CofE.

I would like to end this thesis with two participant quotations, alongside a quotation from the bisexual activist Robyn Ochs. Whilst not discussing a religious context here, I believe that Ochs’ call for visibility and the creation of a positive bisexual identity resonates deeply with the literature and participant data disseminated within this thesis, and provides ways in which the Church could consider how to move forward with bisexual inclusivity. The participant quotations below, from Katie and Ruth, also consider how, as an institution, the CofE can become a more welcoming and affirming place for the bisexual community:

BC001: ‘To have it normalised to the point where it’s not even an issue where, you know, my kids - should I choose to have them - and my kid’s kids don’t even question, like it’s not even a concern in their mind what their sexuality is, what their religion is, and it is just so accepted... that I think would be the goal for me over all, but what that looks like for me personally, knowing the world that is, I don’t really know... I don’t think we’ll get to that point in my lifetime if I’m honest, but I think for me, you know, I think the goal for me would be to lay down a foundation of sorts, or at least an example [that] the next generation can pick up’ (lines 178 – 184, p. 6)

BC006: ‘You can’t allow that [people misunderstanding] to contribute further to the whole ‘sweeping under the carpet’ mentality, so you do need to, at the same time, educate these people’ (lines 356 – 358, pp. 12 – 13)

‘So, how do we make things better? Given so many obstacles [...], how can a bisexual person come to a positive bisexual identity? Understand the social dynamics of oppression and stereotyping. Get support and validation from others. Join a support group [...] Find a friend to talk to. Silence kills. I encourage bisexual people to come out as bisexual to the maximum extent that you can do so safely [...] Bisexuals must remember that neither bisexuals nor gays and lesbians created heterosexism and that as bisexuals we are its victims as well as potential beneficiaries. Although we must be aware that we, as bisexuals, may [...] be accorded privileges that are denied to gays, lesbians and to transgender people of any orientation, this simply calls for us to make thoughtful decisions about how to live our lives. We did not create the inequities, and **we must not feel guilty for who we are; we need only be responsible for our actions**’ (*Rec-og-nize: The Voices of Bisexual Men*, 2009, p. 294)

Reference list

- Agee, J. (2009). 'Developing qualitative research questions: a reflective process', *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 22(4), pp. 431 – 447
- Aggleton, P., Ball, A., and Mane, P. (2000). 'Young people, sexuality and relationships', *Sexual and Relationship Therapy*, 15(3), pp. 213 – 220
- Ahmed, S. (2006). *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Alempijevic, D., Beriashvili, R., Beynon, J., Birmanns, B., Brasholt, M., Cohen, J., Duque, M., Duterte, P., va Es, A., Fernando, R., Fincanci, S. K., Hamzeh, S., Hansen, S. H., Hardi, L., Heisler, M., Iacopino, V., Leth, P. M., Lin, J., Louahia, S., Luytkis, H., Modvig, J., Mendez, M-D. M., Moreno, A., Moscoso, V., Oral, R., Ozkalipci, O., Payne-James, J., Quiroga, J., Reyes, H., Rogde, S., Sajantila, A., Schick, M., Terzidis, A., Thomsen, J. L., Tidball-Binz, M., Treue, F., Vanezis, P., and Viera, D. N. (2020). 'Statement on conversion therapy', *Journal of Forensic and Legal Medicine*, 72, pp. 1 – 6
- Alexander, J. (2011). 'Bisexuality in the Media', *Journal of Bisexuality*, 7(1-2), pp. 113 – 124
- Alford-Harkey, M., and Haffner, D. (2014). *Bisexuality: Making the Invisible Visible in Faith Communities*. Westport, CT: Religious Institute, Inc.
- Allen, D. (1972). 'Mircea Eliade's Phenomenological Analysis of Religious Experience', *The Journal of Religion*, 52(2), pp. 170 – 186
- Allen, D. (2005). 'Phenomenology of religion', in Hinnells, J. R. (ed.) *The Routledge Companion to the Study of Religion*. London: Routledge, pp. 182 – 207
- Althaus-Reid, M. (2000). *Indecent Theology: Theological Perversions in Sex, Gender and Politics*. London: Routledge.
- Ammerman, N. (1997). 'Golden Rule Christianity: Lived Religion in the American Mainstream', in Hall, D. (ed.) *Lived Religion in America*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, pp. 196 – 216
- Ammerman, N. T. (2014). 'Finding Religion in Everyday Life', *Sociology of Religion*, 75(2), pp. 189 – 207
- Ammerman, N. (2021). *Studying Lived Religion: Contexts and Practices*. New York, NY: NYU Press.
- Anderlini-D'Onofrio, A., and Alexander, A. (2014). *Bisexuality and Queer Theory: Intersections, Connections and Challenges*. New York: Routledge.
- Anderson, J. A. (2011). 'Conservative Christianity, the Global South and the Battle over Sexual Orientation', *Third World Quarterly*, 32(9), pp. 1589 – 1605
- Anderson, E., McCormack, M., and Ripley, M. (2016). 'Sixth form girls and bisexual burden',

Journal of Gender Studies, 25(1), pp. 24 – 34

Anderson, A., and Roth, A. L. (2020). ‘Queer erasure: Internet browsing can be biased against LGBTQ people, new exclusive research shows’, *Index on Censorship*, 49(1), pp. 75 – 77

The Anglican Communion Office (2004). *Lambeth Conference 1998: Resolution 1.10 Human Sexuality*. Available at:

<https://web.archive.org/web/20050425164052/http://www.anglicancommunion.org/windsor2004/appendix/p3.6.cfm> (Accessed: 14th July 2023)

Arriaga, A. S., and Parent, M. C. (2019). ‘Partners and Prejudice: Bisexual Partner Gender and Experiences of Binegativity From Heterosexual, Lesbian, and Gay People’, *Psychol Sex Orientat Gend Divers*, 6(3), pp. 382 – 391

Arthur, S., Mitchell, M., Lewis, J., and Nicholls, C. M. (2013). ‘Designing fieldwork’, in Ritchie, J., Lewis, J., Nicholls, C. M., and Ormston, R. (eds.), *Qualitative Research Practice: A Guide for Social Science Students and Researchers*. London: SAGE Publications Ltd., pp. 147 – 176

Ault, A. (1996). ‘Ambiguous identity in an Unambiguous Sex/Gender Structure: The Case of Bisexual Women’, *The Sociological Quarterly*, 37(3), pp. 449 – 463

Avishai, O. (2020). ‘Religious Queer People Beyond Identity Conflict: Lessons from Orthodox LGBT Jews in Israel’, *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 59(2), pp. 360 – 378

Banks, A. E. (2018). *Critiquing Christian Heteronormativity and the Ethics of Shame*. Bachelor’s thesis. College of Charleston. Available at:

<https://api-d.library.cofc.edu/server/api/core/bitstreams/b89b600e-7b5f-4445-bbe0-a1d0e5930441/content> (Accessed: 30th October 2023)

Baptists Together (2024). *Baptists Together*. Available at: <https://baptist.org.uk/> (Accessed: 09th March 2024)

Barak, K. S. (2019). ‘Focusing on the B in LGBTIQ’, in Krane, V. (ed.) *Sex, Gender and Sexuality in Sport: Queer Enquiries*. Abingdon: Routledge., pp. 105 – 122

Barbosa, C., Ribeiro, N. F., and Liechty, T. (2020). “‘I’m Being Told on Sunday Mornings that There’s Nothing Wrong with Me’: Lesbian’s Experiences in an LGBTQ-Oriented Religious Leisure Space’, *Leisure Sciences*, 42(2), pp. 224 – 242

Barker, M., and Langdridge, D (2008). ‘II. Bisexuality: Working with a Silenced Sexuality’, *Feminism and Psychology*, 18(3), pp. 389 – 394

Barker, M., Richards, C., Jones, R., Bowes-Catton, H., Plowman, T., Yockney, J., and Morgan, M. (2012). *The Bisexuality Report: Bisexual inclusion in LGBT equality and diversity*. Available at: https://oro.open.ac.uk/52881/1/The%20BisexualityReport%20Feb.2012_0.pdf (Accessed: 1st March 2023)

Barker, M. J. (2015). ‘Depression and/or oppression? Bisexuality and mental health’, *Journal of*

Bisexuality, 15(3), pp. 369 – 384

Barnes, D. M., and Meyer, I. H. (2012). 'Religious Affiliation, Internalised Homophobia, and Mental Health in Lesbians, Gay Men, and Bisexuals', *Am J Orthopsychiatry*, 82(4), pp. 505 – 515

Barnes, S. (2013). 'To Welcome or Affirm: Black Clergy Views About Homosexuality, Inclusivity, and Church Leadership', *Journal of Homosexuality*, 60(10), pp. 1409 – 1433

Barringer, M. N., Gay, D. A., and Lynxwiler, J. P. (2013). 'Gender, Religiosity, Spirituality, and Attitudes toward Homosexuality', *Sociological Spectrum*, 33(3), pp. 240 – 257

Bartholomay, D. J., and Pendleton, M. (2023). 'Doing Sexuality: How Married Bisexual, Queer, and Pansexual People Navigate Passing and Erasure', *The Sociological Quarterly*, 64(3), pp. 520 – 539

Barton, B. (2010). "'Abomination" – Life as a Bible Belt Gay', *Journal of Homosexuality*, 57(4), pp. 465 – 484

Batto, B. F. (2000). 'The Institution of Marriage in Genesis 2 and in "Atrahasis"', *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 62(4), pp. 621 – 631

Baumgartner, R. (2021). "'I think that I'm not a relationship person": Bisexual women's accounts of (internalised) binegativity in non-monogamous relationship narratives', in Baumgartner, R., and Maliepaard, E. (eds.) *Bisexuality in Europe: Sexual Citizenship, Romantic Relationships, and Bi+ Identities*, Abingdon, Oxon.: Routledge, pp. 125 – 130

Baumgartner, R., and Maliepaard, E. (2021). *Bisexuality in Europe: Sexual Citizenship, Romantic Relationships, and Bi+ Identities*. Abingdon, Oxon.: Routledge.

Baxter-Williams, E. (2016). 'Allies in the Bisexual Community', in Harrad, K. (ed.) *Purple Prose: Bisexuality in Britain*. Portland, OR: Thorntree Press, pp. 273 – 284

bbc.co.uk (2021). *Religious group warns against LGBT+ conversion therapy ban*. Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-56420328> (Accessed: 10th July 2023)

bbc.co.uk (2023a). *What is conversion therapy and when will it be banned?* Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/explainers-56496423> (Accessed: 2nd February 2024)

bbc.co.uk (2023b). *Conversion therapy ban not included in King's Speech*. Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-67345496> (Accessed: 2nd February 2024)

Beach, L. B., and Hall, C. D. X. (2020). '*Bi Us, For Us*: Articulating Foundational Principles for Research in Partnership with Bisexual Communities', *Journal of Bisexuality*, 20(3), pp. 251 – 272

Beagan, B., and Hattie, B. (2015). 'Religion, Spirituality, and LGBTQ Identity Integration', *Journal of LGBT Issues in Counseling*, 9(1), pp. 92 – 117

Beckwith, R. (2004). 'The Windsor Report and the Future of the Anglican Communion', *Churchman*, 118(4), pp. 359 – 365

Beeching, V. (2018). *Undivided: Coming out, becoming whole and living free from shame*. Glasgow: William Collins.

Bennett, K. (1992). 'Feminist bisexuality: A both/and option for an either/or world', in Weise, E. R. (ed.) *Close to home: Bisexuality and feminism*, Seattle: The Seal Press, pp. 205 – 231

Bennett, C., and Harden, J. (2019). 'Sexuality as taboo: using interpretative phenomenological analysis and a Foucauldian lens to explore fathers' practices in talking to their children about puberty, relationships and reproduction', *Journal of Research in Nursing*, 24(1-2), pp. 22 – 33

Bergmann, S. (2007). 'Theology in its Spatial Turn: Space, Place and Built Environments Challenging and Changing the Images of God', *Religion Compass*, 1(3), pp. 353 – 379

Berlant, L., and Warner, M. (1998). 'Sex in Public', *Critical Enquiry*, 24(2), pp. 554 – 555

Bernhardt-House, P. (2010). 'Reinforcing Binaries, Downgrading Passions: Bisexual Invisibility in Mainstream Queer Christian Theology' *Journal of Bisexuality*, 10(1/2), pp. 54 – 63

Bethmont, R. (2019). 'Blessing Same-Sex Unions in the Church of England: The Liturgical Challenge of Same-Sex Couples' Demand for Equal Marriage Rites', *Journal of Anglican Studies*, 17, pp. 148 – 167

Bethmont, R. (2023). 'Negotiating Dissonance between the Religious, the Civil, and the Legal in American Same-Sex Weddings', *Studies in Church History*, 59, pp. 492 – 512

Bieschke, K. J., Paul, P. L., and Blasko, K. A. (2007). 'Review of Empirical Research Focused on the Experience of Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Clients in Counselling and Psychotherapy', in Bieschke, K. J., Perez, R. M., and DeBord, K. A. (eds.) *Handbook of counselling and psychotherapy with lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender clients*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, pp. 293 – 315

BiMedia.org, via web.archive.org (2023, original 2015). *June 1972: The Ithaca Statement*. Available at: <https://web.archive.org/web/20151015231948/http://bimedia.org/1984/june-1972-the-ithaca-statement/> (Accessed: 10th July 2023)

Blackwell, C. W. (2008). 'Nursing Implications in the Application of Conversion Therapies on Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Clients', *Issues in Mental Health Nursing*, 29(6), pp. 651 – 665

Bochow, A., and van Dijk, R. (2012). 'Christian Creations of New Spaces of Sexuality, Reproduction, and Relationships in Africa: Exploring Faith and Religious Heterotopia', *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 42(4), pp. 325 – 344

Boland, J., Banks, S., Krabbe, R., Lawrence, S., Murray, T., Henning, T., and Vandenberg, M. (2022).

‘A COVID-19-era rapid review: using Zoom and Skype for qualitative group research’, *Public Health Research and Practice*, 32(2), pp. 1 – 9

Bourke, B. (2014). ‘Positionality: Reflecting on the Research Process’, *The Qualitative Report*, 19(33), pp. 1 – 9

Bracewell, K., Hargreaves, P., and Stanley, N. (2022). ‘The Consequences of the COVID-19 Lockdown on Stalking Victimisation’, *Journal of Family Violence*, 37, pp. 951 – 957

The British Psychological Society (2020). *Ethics best practice guidance on conducting research with human participants during Covid-19*. Available at: <https://cms.bps.org.uk/sites/default/files/2022-07/Conducting%20research%20with%20human%20participants%20during%20Covid-19%20%281%29.pdf> (Accessed: 20th January 2023)

British Social Attitudes (2023). *Homosexuality*. Available at: <https://bsa.natcen.ac.uk/latest-report/british-social-attitudes-30/personal-relationships/homosexuality.aspx> (Accessed: 27th July 2023)

Brown, C. (2013). *The Death of Christian Britain: Understanding Secularisation 1800 – 2000*. London: Routledge.

Brown, A., and Woodhead, L. (2017). *That Was The Church, That Was: How the Church of England lost the English People*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing.

Browne, K., and Nash, C. J. (2010). *Queer Methods and Methodologies*. London: Routledge.

Browne, B. C. (2013). ‘Recording the Personal: The Benefits in Maintaining Research Diaries for Documenting the Emotional and Practical Challenges of Fieldwork in Unfamiliar Settings’, *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 12, pp. 420 – 435

Budworth, P. (2023). ‘Care, comfort, and capacity: The importance of being flexible in research with Disabled and chronically ill people’, *SSM – Qualitative Research in Health*, 4, pp. 1 – 9

Butler, J. (1990). *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge.

Butler, J. (1993). *Bodies that matter: On the discursive limits of “sex”*. New York: Routledge.

Cadwell, M. (2013). *In Search of Anglican Comprehensiveness: A Study in the Theologies of Hooker, Maurice, and Gore*. PhD thesis. University of Toronto.

Callis, A. S. (2009). ‘Playing with Butler and Foucault: Bisexuality and Queer Theory’, *Journal of Bisexuality*, 9(1), pp. 213 – 233

Callis, A. S. (2014). ‘Bisexual, pansexual, queer: Non-binary identities and the sexual borderlands’, *Sexualities*, 17(1-2), pp. 63 – 80

Carrow-Boyd, G. C. (2013). ‘Technology and Theology: A Qualitative Study of Social Media Use for

Religious Education’, *Adult Education Research Conference*.

Available at: <https://newprairiepress.org/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2964&context=aerc> (Accessed: 21st February 2025)

Carter, D. (2017). ‘Revelations: On Sex, Sexuality, and Religion’ in Nickodemus, L., and Desmond, E. (eds). *The Bi-Ble: Personal narratives and essays about bisexuality*. Edinburgh: Monstrous Regiment Publishing Ltd., pp. 147 – 153

The Catholic Church Bishop’s Conference of England and Wales (2024). *The Catholic Church Bishop’s Conference of England and Wales*. Available at: <https://www.cbcew.org.uk/> (Accessed: 9th March 2024)

Castleman, M. (2016). *The Continuing Controversy over Bisexuality*. Available at: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/intl/blog/all-about-sex/201603/the-continuing-controversy-over-bisexuality> (Accessed: 17th November 2023)

Chan, C. D., and Farmer, L. B. (2017). ‘Making the Case for Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis with LGBTGEQ+ Persons and Communities’, *Journal of LGBT Issues in Counseling*, 11(4), pp. 285 – 300

Chan, C. D. (2018). *The Lived Intersectional Experiences of Privilege and Oppression of Queer Men of Color in Counselor Education Doctoral Programs: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis*. PhD thesis. George Washington University.

The Christian Institute (2022). *Church leaders present ‘conversion therapy’ letter to Downing Street*. Available at: <https://www.christian.org.uk/news/church-leaders-present-conversion-therapy-letter-to-downing-street/> (Accessed: 10th July 2023)

Chronc, L. (2024). *Religious empowerment and LGBTQ+ identities: Contradiction or Harmony?* Available at: <https://www.rug.nl/research/centre-for-religious-studies/research-centres/centre-religion-conflict-globalization/blog/religious-empowerment-and-lgbt-identities-contradiction-or-harmony?lang=en> (Accessed: 21st February 2025)

Church of England, (2013). *Pilling Report published*.

Available at: <https://www.churchofengland.org/news-and-media/news-and-statements/pilling-report-published> (Accessed: 17th February 2021)

Church of England (2020a). *Living in Love and Faith: Christian teaching and learning about identity, sexuality, relationships, and marriage*. London: Church House Publishing.

Church of England (2020b). *About Living in Love and Faith*.

Available at: <https://www.churchofengland.org/resources/living-love-and-faith/about-living-love-and-faith> (Accessed: 18 February 2021)

Church of England (2020c). *Living in Love and Faith: The Course. A 5-session course for groups*.

Available at:

https://llf.churchofengland.org/pluginfile.php/13246/block_html/content/LLF%20The%20Course%20

0Downloadable%20Version.pdf (Accessed: 29th January 2025)

Church of England (2021a). *Report of Proceedings 2021, General Synod July Group of Sessions, Friday 9 July 2021 – Monday 12 July 2021, Virtual Meeting*. Available at: <https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2021-12/complete-report-of-proceedings-july-21.pdf> (Accessed: 10th July 2023)

Church of England (2021b). *Report of Proceedings 2021, General Synod November Group of Sessions, Tuesday 16 November 2021 – Wednesday 17 November 2021, Church House, London*. Available at: [report-of-proceedings-november-2021.pdf](https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2021-12/report-of-proceedings-november-2021.pdf) (churchofengland.org) (Accessed: 10th July 2023)

Church of England (2023a). *The Church of England's Doctrine of Marriage*. Available at: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1aYyMitqZL7c0ftjxM3_maGmptBzVVz_D/view?pli=1 (Accessed: 10th January 2024)

Church of England (2023b). *Private Members' Motions*. Available at: <https://www.churchofengland.org/about/governance/general-synod/special-agendas/private-members-motions> (Accessed: 27th July 2023)

Church of England (2023c). *Living in Love and Faith: A response from the Bishops of the Church of England about identity, sexuality, relationships and marriage*. Available at: https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2023-01/final-bishops-response-to-llf-20-jan23_0.pdf (Accessed: 19th July 2023)

Church of England (2023d). *GS2303: Update to General Synod of the Implementation Work for Living in Love and Faith*. Available at: [gs-2303-living-in-love-and-faith-update.pdf](https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2023-01/gs-2303-living-in-love-and-faith-update.pdf) (Accessed: 3rd February 2025)

Church of England (2023e). *Questions Notice Paper 2*. Available at: https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2023-02/QUESTIONS_Note_Paper_2_LLF_February_2023.pdf (Accessed: 3rd February 2025)

Church of England (2023f). *GS2289: Living in Love and Faith. A RESPONSE FROM THE BISHOPS OF THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND*. Available at: <https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2023-01/gs-2289-living-in-love-and-faith.pdf> (Accessed: 3rd February 2025)

Church of England (2024). *Living in Love and Faith: Bishop Helen-Ann Hartley steps down*. Available at: <https://www.churchofengland.org/media/press-releases/living-love-and-faith-bishop-helen-ann-hartley-steps-down> (Accessed: 2nd February 2025)

Churchill, F. (2021). *Why are employers leaving Stonewall's diversity programme?* Available at: <https://www.peoplemanagement.co.uk/article/1743092/why-are-employers-leaving-stonewall-diversity-programme> (Accessed: 24th April 2024)

Cipriano, A. E., Nguyen, D., & Holland, K. J. (2023). “In order to be bi, you have to prove it”: A qualitative examination of plurisexual women's experiences with external and internalized pressure to

- prove their identities', *Psychology of Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity*, 10(4), pp. 638 – 649
- Clarke, V., and Turner, K. (2007). 'V. Clothes Maketh the Queer? Dress, Appearance and the Construction of Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Identities', *Feminism & Psychology*, 17(2), pp. 267 –276
- Clements, B. (2017). *Attitudes towards Gay Rights*.
Available at: <https://www.brin.ac.uk/figures/attitudes-towards-gay-rights/> (Accessed: 1st March 2023)
- Collins, A., Bronte-Tinkew, J., and Burkhauser, M. (2008). 'Using incentives To Increase Participation In Out-Of-School Time Programs', *Child Trends*, 25, no page range
- Collins-Mayo, S. (2012). 'Youth and religion. An international perspective', *Theo-Web. Zeitschrift für Religionspädagogik*. 11, pp. 80 – 94
- Conley, G. (2016). *Boy Erased: A Memoir*. London: Penguin Publishing Group.
- Conine, D. E., Campau, S. C., and Petronelli, A. K. (2022). 'LGBTQ+ conversion therapy and applied behavior analysis: A call to action', *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, 55, pp. 6 – 18
- Conrad, K., & Crawford, J. (1998). 'Passing/out: The politics of disclosure in queer-positive pedagogy' *Modern Language Studies*, 28(3/4), pp. 153 – 162
- Cooksey, E., and Doom, T. (2011). 'The Role of Religion in the Sexual Lives of Teens', in Collins-Mayo, S., and Dandelion, P. (eds.). *Religion and Youth*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, pp. 105 – 112
- Corey, S. (2017). 'All Bi Myself: Analysing Television's Presentation of Female Bisexuality', *Journal of Bisexuality*, 17(2), pp. 190 – 205
- Cornwall, S. (2015). *Intersex, theology, and the Bible: troubling bodies in church, text, and society*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Cornwall, S. (2023). 'Incompleteness, Imperial Legacies, and Anglican Fudge: How Concerns about Gender and Sexuality Affect How Anglicans Do Theology', *Anglican Theological Review*, 105(4), pp. 1 – 27
- Cousens, B., Morrison, J. S., and Fendrick, S. P. (2008). 'Using the Contextual Orientation to Facilitate the Study of Bible with Generation X', *Journal of Jewish Education*, 74(1), pp. 6 – 28
- Cranfield, C. E. B. (2004). *The Apostles' Creed: A Faith to Live By*. London: Continuum.
- Cresswell, T. (2004). *Place: A Short Introduction*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
- Cronin, C. J., and Lowes, L. (2016). 'Brief Encounters with Qualitative Methods in Health Research: Phenomenology and Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis', *Cumbria Partnership Journal of Research Practice and Learning*, 5(1), pp. 8 – 16
- Cumming-Potvin, W. M. (2022). *LGBTQI+ Allies in Education, Advocacy, Activism, and*

Participatory Collaborative Research. London: Routledge.

Daly, S. J., King, N., and Yeadon-Lee, T. (2018). ‘Femme it Up or Dress it Down’: Appearance and Bisexual Women in Monogamous Relationships’, *Journal of Bisexuality*, 18(3), pp. 257 – 277

Damianakis, R., and Woodford, M. R. (2012). ‘Qualitative Research with Small Connected Communities: Generating New Knowledge While Upholding Research Ethics’, *Qualitative Health Research*, 22(5), pp. 708 – 718

Däumer, E. D. (1992). ‘Queer Ethics; Or, The Challenge of Bisexuality to Lesbian Ethics’, *Hypatia*, 7(4), pp. 91 – 105

Davie, G. (1994). *Religion in Britain since 1945: Believing without Belonging*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Publishing.

Dawes, H. (2021). [Twitter] 30 October.

Available at: <https://twitter.com/revhelend/status/1454354486844141568?s=20> (Accessed: 17th April 2023)

de Barros, A. C. (2020). ‘“Gay Now”: Bisexual Erasure in Supernatural Media from 1983 to 2003’, *Journal of Bisexuality*, 20(1), pp. 104 – 117

de Certeau, M. (1984). *The practice of everyday life*. Oakland, CA: University of California Press.

de Freitas, H. M. R., Oliviera, M., Jenkins, M., and Popjoy, O. (1998). ‘The Focus Group, A Qualitative Research Method: Reviewing the Theory, and Providing Guidelines to its Planning’, ISRC, Merrick School of Business, University of Baltimore (MD, EUA), WP ISRC No. 010298, pp. 1 – 22

Deakin, H., and Wakefield, K. (2014). ‘Skype interviewing: reflections of two PhD researchers’, *Qualitative Research*, 14(5), pp. 603 – 616

Dewey, J. J. H., Schlosser, L. Z., Kinney, R. S., and Burkard, A. W. (2014). ‘Faithful Allies: The Experiences of LGB-Affirming, White Christian Clergy’, *Journal of LGBT Issues in Counselling*, 8(3), pp. 298 – 321

DeYoung, K. (2015). *What Does the Bible Really Teach about Homosexuality?* Wheaton: Good News Publishers.

DiDonato, T (2019). *Why Bisexual People Face Unique Dating Challenges*. Available at: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/meet-catch-and-keep/201910/why-bisexual-people-face-unique-dating-challenges> (Accessed: 11th July 2023)

Dieumegard, G., Nogry, S., Ollagnier-Beldame, M., and Perrin, N. (2021). ‘Lived experience as a unit of analysis for the study of learning’, *Learning, Culture and Social Interaction*, 31(b), pp. 1 – 11

Dobbs, L. (2000). ‘Look to This Day’, in Koldony, D. (ed.) *Blessed Bi Spirit: Bisexual People of Faith*. New York: Continuum International Publishing Group Inc., pp. 53 – 64

- Dowson, R. (2020). 'A Discussion of the Practical and Theological Impacts of COVID-19 on Religious Worship, Events and Pilgrimage, from a Christian Perspective', *International Journal of Religious Tourism and Pilgrimage*, 8(7), pp. 33 – 51
- Drabble, L. A., and Eliason, M. J. (2021). 'Introduction to Special Issue: Impacts of the COVID- 19 Pandemic on LGBTQ+ Health and Wellbeing', *Journal of Homosexuality*, 68(4), pp. 545 – 559
- Dube, K. for eyeradio.org (2023). "Marriage is between a man and a woman", says Archbishop Badi. Available at: <https://www.eyeradio.org/marriage-is-between-man-and-woman-says-archbishop-badi/> (Accessed: 14th July 2023)
- Dunlop, B. J., Hunter, C., Shafti, M., Coleman, S. E., Hartley, S., and Taylor, P. J. (2022). "Why is it so different now I'm bisexual?": young bisexual people's experiences of identity, belonging, self-injury, and COVID19', *Psychology and Sexuality*, 13(3), pp. 756 – 773
- Durac, L. (2007). 'Mircea Eliade: the hermeneutics of the religious phenomenon', 4th *International Conference on Human Being in Contemporary Philosophy*, Volgograd, May 28-31 2007. Available at: <https://volgograd2007.goldenideashome.com/2%20Papers/Durac%20Livia%20p%202.pdf> (Accessed: 1st February 2024)
- Dworkin, S. H. (2001). 'Treating the bisexual client', *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 57(5), pp. 671 – 680
- Dwyer, S. C., and Buckle, J. L. (2009). 'The Space Between: On Being an Insider-Outsider in Qualitative Research', *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 8(1), pp. 54 – 63
- Dyer, H. (2021). *The Little Book of LGBTQ+*. London: Summersdale Publishers Ltd.
- Edgell, P., and Docka, D. (2007). 'Beyond the Nuclear Family? Familism and Gender Ideology in Diverse Religious Communities', *Sociological Forum*, 22(1), pp. 25 – 50
- Edwards, J. (2014). *Bisexual in the church: A source of disruptive conversation*'. Available at: <https://www.christiancentury.org/article/2014-06/bisexual-church> (Accessed: 21st November 2022)
- Elia, J. P. (2010). 'Bisexuality and School Culture: School as a Prime Site for Bi-Intervention', *Journal of Bisexuality*, 10(4), pp. 452 – 471
- El-Shaieb, M., and Wurtele, S. K. (2009). 'Parents' Plans to Discuss Sexuality with Their young Children', *American Journal of Sexuality Education*, 4(2), pp. 103 – 115
- Engin, M. (2011). 'Research Diary: A Tool for Scaffolding', *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 10(3), pp. 296 – 306
- Enstedt, D. (2015). 'Blessing same-sex unions and the invention of a 'genuine homosexuality' in the Church of Sweden', *Sexualities*, 18(5-6), pp. 564 – 592

Eskridge Jr., W. N. (1993). 'A History of Same-Sex Marriage', *Virginia Law Review*, 79(7), pp.1419 – 1513

Evangelical Focus (2021). *UK Methodist Church approves same-sex marriage and affirms cohabitation*. Available at: <https://evangelicalfocus.com/europe/12319/uk-methodist-church-approves-same-sex-marriage-and-affirms-cohabitation> (Accessed: 14 July 2023)

Fahs, B., and Swank, E. (2021). 'Pray the gay will stay? Church shopping and religious gatekeeping around homosexuality in an audit study of Christian church officials', *Psychology of Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity*, 8(1), pp. 106 – 118

Farley, H. (2023). *Church of England bishops refuse to back gay marriage*. Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-64313367> (Accessed: 17 April 2023)

Farmer, L. B., and Byrd, R. (2015). 'Genderism in the LGBTQQIA Community: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis', *Journal of LGBT Issues in Counseling*, 9(4), pp. 288 – 310

Faulkner, S. L., and Hecht, M. L. (2011). 'The negotiation of closetable identities: A narrative analysis of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered queer Jewish identity', *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 28(6), pp. 829 – 847

Federici, A. (2025). 'Echoes of Krafft-Ebing's Psychopathia Sexualis in Scientific Periodicals: Sexual and Mental Pathology in Late Nineteenth- and Early Twentieth Century Medical Discourse', *Serie Speciale "Quaderni di Lea – Scrittori e scritture d'Oriente e d'Occidente"*, 7, pp. 81 – 98

Feinstein, B., and Dyar, C. (2017). 'Bisexuality, Minority Stress, and Health', *Curr Sex Health Rep*, 9(1), pp. 42 – 49

Feray, J-C., Herzer, M., and Peppel, G. W. (1990). 'Homosexual Studies and Politics in the 19th Century: Karl Maria Kertbeny', *Journal of Homosexuality*, 19(1), pp. 23 – 48

Fielder, B., and Ezzy, D. (2018). *Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Christians: Queer Christians, Authentic Selves*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.

Finke, L. (2020). *Queerfully and Wonderfully Made: A Guide for LGBTQ+ Christian Teens*. Minneapolis, MN: Beaming Books.

Fish, J. N., McInroy, L. B., Paceley, M. S., Williams, N. D., Henderson, S., Levine, D. S., and Edsall, R. D. (2020). "'I'm Kinda Stuck at Home With Unsupportive Parents Right Now': LGBTQ Youths' Experiences With COVID-19 and the Importance of Online Support', *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 67, pp. 450 – 452

Flanders, C. E. (2017). 'Under the Bisexual Umbrella: Diversity of Identity and Experience', *Journal of Bisexuality*, 17(1), pp. 1 – 6

Flanders, C. E., Dobinson, C., and Logie, C. (2017). 'Young bisexual women's perspectives on the

relationship between bisexual stigma, mental health, and sexual health: a qualitative study', *Critical Public Health*, 27(1), pp. 75 – 85

Flanders, C., Anderson, R., Tarasoff, L., and Robinson, M. (2019). 'Bisexual Stigma, Sexual Violence, and Sexual Health Among Bisexual and Other Plurisexual Women: A Cross-Sectional Survey Study', *The Journal of Sex Research*, 56(9), pp. 1115 – 1127

Formby, E. (2017). *Exploring LGBT Spaces and Communities: Contrasting Identities, Belongings and Wellbeing*. London: Routledge.

Foucault, M. (1985, 1986). *The History of Sexuality (Volumes II / III)*. Paris: Éditions Gallimard.

Francis, J. J., Johnston, M., Robertson, C., Glidewell, L., Entwistle, V., Eccles, M. P., and Grimshaw, J. M. (2010). 'What is an adequate sample size? Operationalising data saturation for theory-based interview studies', *Psychology and Health*, 25(1), pp. 1229 – 1245

Gaiser, T. J. (2008). 'Online focus groups', in Blank, G., Fielding, N. G., and Lee, R. M. (eds). *The SAGE Handbook of Online Research Methods*. London: SAGE Publications Ltd., pp. 290 – 306

Gale, J. (2024). *How does social media affect young people's faith?* Bachelor's thesis. Birmingham Newman University.

Galletta, A., and Cross, W. E. (2013). *Mastering the Semi-Structured Interview and Beyond*. New York, NY: New York University Press.

Ganzevoort, R. R., and Roeland, J. (2014). 'Lived religion: the praxis of Practical Theology', *International Journal of Practical Theology*, 18(1), pp. 91 – 101

Garcia Garcia, S., and Barclay, K. (2020) *Adapting research methodologies in the Covid-19 pandemic: Resources for researchers*. Available at: <https://www.uts.edu.au/sites/default/files/2020-06/uts-adapting-research-methodologies-covid-19-pandemic-resources-researchers.pdf> (Accessed: 20 January 2023)

Garnets, L., and Kimmel, D. (2003). *Psychological Perspectives on Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Experiences*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.

Garrigan, S. (2009). 'Queer Worship', *Theology & Sexuality*, 15(1), pp. 211 – 230

Gay, D. A., Lynxwiler, J. P., and Smith, P. (2015). 'Religiosity, Spirituality, and Attitudes Toward Same-Sex Marriage: A Cross-Sectional Cohort Comparison', *SAGE Open*, 5(3), pp. 1 – 14

Gelinas, L., Pierce, R., Winkler, S., Cohen, I. G., Lynch, H. F., and Bierer, B. E. (2017). 'Using Social Media as a Research Recruitment Tool: Ethical Issues and Recommendations', 17(3), pp. 3 – 14

George, S. (1993). *Women and Bisexuality*. London: Scarlet Press.

Gershon, L. (2021). *The Origins of LGBTQ-Affirming Churches*.

Available at: <https://daily.jstor.org/the-origins-of-lgbtq-affirming-churches/> (Accessed: 15 October 2023)

Giesecking, J. J. (2016). 'LGBTQ Spaces and Places', in Springate, M. E. (ed.) *LGBTQ America: A Theme Study of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer History*. Washington D.C.: National Park Foundation, pp. 14-1 – 14-31

Gill, P., Stewart, K., Treasure, E., and Chadwick, B. (2008). 'Methods of data collection in qualitative research: interviews and focus groups', *Br Dent J.*, 204(6), pp. 291 – 5

Gilliland, C. C., and Krull, L. M. (2020). 'Getting Permission to Break the Rules: Clergy Respond to LGBTQ Exclusion in the United Methodist Church', *Sociology of Religion*, 83(4), pp. 480 – 504

Goddard, A. (2021). *Is 'Living in Love and Faith' largely a failure?* Available at: <https://www.psephizo.com/sexuality-2/is-living-in-love-and-faith-largely-a-failure> (Accessed: 27 July 2023)

Gold, S., and Stewart, D. (2011). 'Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Students Coming Out at the Intersection of Spirituality and Sexual Identity', *Journal of LGBT Issues in Counseling*, 5(1), pp. 237 – 258

Goldingay, J. E., LeMarquand, G. R., Sumner, G. R., and Westberg, D. A. (2011). 'Same-Sex Marriage and Anglican Theology: A View from the Traditionalists', *Anglican Theological Review*, 93(1), pp. 1 – 50

Goldman, R. (1996). 'Who is that queer queer? Exploring norms around sexuality, race and class in queer theory', in Beemyn, B., and Eliason, M. (eds.) *Queer studies: A lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender anthology*. New York: New York University Press, pp. 169 – 182

Golzar, J., Noor, S., and Tajik, O. (2022). 'Convenience sampling', *International Journal of Education and Language Studies*, 2, pp. 72 – 77

Gonzales, G., de Mola, E. L., Gavulic, K. A., McKay, T., and Purcell, C. (2020). 'Mental Health Needs Among Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender College Students During the COVID-19 Pandemic', *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 67, pp. 645 – 648

Goodine, R. (2015). 'The Silent B: The Erasure of Bisexuality', in O'Neill, B., Mulé, N. J., and Swan, T. A. (eds.) *LGBTQ People and Social Work: Intersectional Perspectives*. Toronto, Canadian Scholars Press, pp. 107 – 126

Gordon, E. J., and Prohaska, T. T. (2006). 'The Ethics of Withdrawal from Study Participation', *Accountability in Research*, 13(4), pp. 285 – 309

Gornish, H. (1988). 'Supermarket Religion by Rabbi Harvey Gornish', *The Jewish Review*, 1(3), no page range. Available at: <http://thejewishreview.org/articles/?id=71#:~:text=Supermarket%20Religion%3F%20refers%20to%20an%20individual%27s%20desire%20to,his%20agenda%20or%20which%20grant%20him>

%20some%20meaning (Accessed: 25th July 2023)

Goss, R. (1999). 'Queer Theologies as Transgressive Metaphors: New Paradigms for Hybrid Sexual Theologies', *Theology and Sexuality*, 5(1), pp. 43 – 53

Gray, L., Wong-Wylie, G., Rempel, G. R., and Cook, K. (2020). 'Expanding Qualitative Research Interviewing Strategies: Zoom Video Communications', *The Qualitative Report*, 25(5), pp. 1291 – 1301

Gschwandtner, C. M. (2019). 'What is Phenomenology of Religion? (Part II): The Phenomenology of Religious Experience', *Philosophy Compass*, 14, pp. 1 – 12

The Guardian (2013). *The Pilling Report: a blessing for gay people but not for conservatives*. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/andrewbrown/2013/nov/28/gay-people-blessing-conservatives> (Accessed: 18th February 2021)

Guest, D., Goss, R. E., West, M., and Bohache, T. (2006). *The Queer Bible Commentary*. London: SCM Press.

Guittar, N. A. (2013). 'The Meaning of Coming Out: From Self-Affirmation to Full Disclosure', *Qualitative Sociology Review*, 9(3), pp. 168 – 187

Gurevich, M., Bailey, H., and Bower, J. (2014). 'Querying theory and politics: the epistemic (dis)location of bisexuality within queer theory', in Anderlini-D'Onofrio, A., and Alexander, A. (eds.) *Bisexuality and Queer Theory: Intersections, Connections and Challenges*. New York: Routledge, pp. 43 – 65

Hall, W. J., Dawes, H. C., and Plocek, N. (2021). 'Sexual Orientation Identity Development Milestones Among Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Queer People: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis', *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12, pp. 1 – 16

Halperin, D. M. (2009). 'Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Bisexual', *Journal of Bisexuality*, 9(3-4), pp. 415 – 455

Hamilton Jr., J. M. (2010). 'The Mystery of Marriage', in Storms, C. S., and Taylor, J. (eds.) *For the Fame of God's Name: Essays in Honor of John Piper*. Wheaton: Crossway, pp. 253 – 271

Harris, M., and Moran, G. (1999). 'Homosexuality: A word not written', in Wink W. (ed.) *Homosexuality and Christian faith: Questions of conscience for the churches*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, pp. 71 – 76

Harris, J., and White, V. (2018). *A Dictionary of Social Work and Social Care*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Harris, R., Wilson-Daily, A. E., Kemmelmeier, M., and Copsey-Blake, M. (2023). "'You're just not real". LGBTQ+ youth and the struggle for identity in school', *Educational Review*, pp. 1 – 20

- Hartman-Linck, J. E. (2014). 'Creating a Bisexual Display: Making Bisexuality Visible', *Journal of Bisexuality*, 14(2), pp. 177 – 193
- Hayfield, N. (2013). '“Never judge a book by its cover?”: students’ understandings of lesbian, gay and bisexual appearance', *Psychology & Sexuality*, 4(1), pp. 16 – 24
- Hayfield, N., Clarke, V., and Halliwell, E. (2014). 'Bisexual women’s understandings of social marginalisation: ‘The heterosexuals don’t understand us but nor do the lesbians’', *Feminism & Psychology*, 24(3), pp. 352 – 372
- Hayfield, N. (2021). *Bisexual and Pansexual Identities: Exploring and Challenging Invisibility and Invalidity*. Abingdon, Oxon.: Routledge.
- Healy, M. (2012). 'St. Paul, Ephesians 5, and Same-Sex Marriage', in Adolphe, J., Vacca, M., and Fastiggi, R. L. (eds.) *St. Paul, the Natural Law, and Contemporary Legal Theory*. Lanham: Lexington Books, pp. 147 – 176
- Heie, H. (2018). *Respectful LGBT Conversations: Seeking Truth, Giving Love, and Modeling Christian Unity*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers.
- Hemmings, C. (2002). *Bisexual Spaces: A Geography of Sexuality and Gender*. London: Routledge.
- Henry, S. (2017). 'Education, queer theology, and spiritual development: disrupting heteronormativity for inclusion in Jewish, Muslim and Christian faith schools', *International Journal of Children's Spirituality*, 23(1), pp. 3 – 16
- Hetherington, K. (2018). 'The Camino de Santiago and Wellbeing: an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of the Pilgrimage Experiences of Australian Women', in Warfield, H.A., and Hetherington, K. (eds.), *Pilgrimage as Transformative Process: The Movement from Fractured to Integrated*. Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, pp. 65 – 76
- Hill, H., and Watson, J. (2006). 'In Christ there is no gay or straight? Homosexuality and the Episcopal Church', *Anglican and Episcopal History*, 75(1), pp. 37 – 68
- Himbaza, I., Schenker, A., and Edart, J-B. (2011). *The Bible on the Question of Homosexuality*. Washington D. C.: The Catholic University of America Press.
- Ho, P. S. Y., and Hu, Y. (2016). 'Pray the gay away: identity conflict between Christianity and sexuality in Hong Kong sexual minorities', *Gender, Place and Culture*, 23(12), pp. 1725 – 173
- Hoang, M., Holloway, J., and Mendoza, R. H. (2011). 'An Empirical Study into the Relationship between Bisexual Identity Congruence, Internalised Biphobia and Infidelity among Bisexual Women', *Journal of Bisexuality*, 11(1), pp. 23 – 38
- Hollis, V. Margolis, R., Williams, M., Swaine, Z., Russo, F., Baldwin, M., and Gill, C. (2022). 'Children and young people’s views on learning about relationships, sex, and sexuality', *NSPCC Learning*.

The Holy Bible. *Various verses*. New Revised Standard Version, Anglicised Edition (1995). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

hooks, b. (2009). *Belonging: a culture of place*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Horn, E. J., Edwards, K., and Terry, S. F. (2011). 'Engaging research participants and building trust', *Genetic Testing and Molecular Biomarkers*, 15(12), pp. 839 – 840

Hornsby, T., and Guest, D. (2016). *Transgender, Intersex, and Biblical Interpretation*. Atlanta: SBL Press.

House of Bishops (1991). *Issues in Human Sexuality: A Statement by the Gouse of Bishops of the General Synod of the Church of England, December 1991*. London: Church House Publishing.

House of Bishops (2003). *Some Issues in Human Sexuality: A Guide to the Debate*. London: Church House Publishing.

House of Bishops (2013). *Report of the House of Bishops Working Group on Human Sexuality (The Pilling Report)*. London: Church House Publishing.

Hunt, S. (2016). *Contemporary Christianity and LGBT Sexualities*. London: Taylor & Francis.

Hunter, D. G. (2018). *Marriage and Sexuality in Early Christianity*. Minneapolis, MN: 1517 Media.

Husserl, E. (1931) [2012 publication]. *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*. London: Routledge.

Iqbal, N., Radulescu, A., Bains, A., and Aleem, S. (2019). 'An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of a Religious Conversion', *Journal of Religion and Health*, 58(1), pp. 426 – 443

Inclusive Church (2023). *About Inclusive Church*. Available at: <https://www.inclusive-church.org/about-us/> (Accessed: 12th July 2023)

Institute for Government Analysis (2022). *Timeline of UK government coronavirus lockdowns and restrictions*. Available at: <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/data-visualisation/timeline-coronavirus-lockdowns> (Accessed: 19th January 2023)

Jamieson, S. (2016). 'Analyse qualitative data', *Education for Primary Care*, 27(5), pp. 398 – 402

Jatmiko, M. I., Syukron, M., and Mekarsari, Y. (2020). 'Covid-19, Harassment and Social Media: A Study of Gender-Based Violence Facilitated by Technology During the Pandemic', *The Journal of Society and Media*, 4(2), pp. 319 – 347

Jennings, M. (2017). 'A Silence Like Thunder: Pastoral and Theological Responses of Australian Pentecostal-Charismatic Churches to LGBTQ Individuals', in Wilkinson, M., and Althouse, P. (eds). *Annual Review of the Sociology of Religion. Volume 8: Pentecostals and the Body*. Leiden, NL: Brill,

pp. 217 – 238

Jimmerson, E. S. (2017). *Rainbow in the Word: LGBTQ Christians' Biblical Memoirs*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers.

Johnson, C. (2002). 'Heteronormative citizenship and the politics of passing', *Sexualities*, 5(3), pp. 317 – 336

Johnson, H. J. (2016). 'Bisexuality, Mental Health, and Media Representation', *Journal of Bisexuality*, 16(3), pp. 378 – 396

Jones, M. J., and Nigbur, D. (2022). '“I believe in something; I don't know what it is”: an exploration of five British Hindus' worldviews using interpretative phenomenological analysis', *Secularism & Nonreligion*, 11(4), pp. 1 – 14

Jordan, M. (1998). *The Invention of Sodomy in Christian Theology*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Jowitt, K. (2016). *Issues with Issues: bisexuality and the Church of England*. Available at: <https://kathleenjowitt.com/2016/06/30/issues-with-issues-bisexuality-and-the-church-of-england/> (Accessed: 18 April 2023)

Jung, G., and Park, H. (2020). 'Bridging sociology of religion to transition to adulthood: The emerging role of religion in young adult's lives', *Social Compass*, 67(3), pp. 428 – 443

Kaiser, K. (2009). 'Protecting respondent confidentiality in qualitative research', *Qualitative Health Research*, 19(11), pp. 1632 – 1641

Kaspar, H., and Müller-Böcker, U. (2006). 'Data protection in qualitative research', in Backhaus, N., and Müller-Böcker, U. (eds). *Gesellschaft und Raum: Konzepte und Kategorien (Society and Space: Concepts and Categories)*. Zürich, Schweiz (Zürich, Switzerland), Druckerei der Zentralstelle der Studentenschaft der Universität Zürich (Printing house of the Central Office of the Student Union of the University of Zurich), pp. 126 – 142

Kelly, S. (2010). 'Qualitative Interviewing Techniques and Styles', in Bourgeault, I., Dingwall, R., and De Vries, R. (eds.) *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Methods in Health Research*. London: SAGE Publications Ltd., pp. 307 – 324

Kendell, R. E. (2002). 'The distinction between personality disorder and mental illness', *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 180, pp. 110 – 115

Khan, M. (2007). 'Conservative Christian teachers: possible consequences for lesbian, gay and bisexual youth', *Intercultural Education*, 17(4), pp. 359 – 371

Kilde, J. H. (2013). 'Approaching Religious Space: An Overview of Theories, Methods, and Challenges in Religious Studies', *Religion & Theology*, 20, pp. 183 – 201

- Kimport, K. (2012). 'Remaking the white wedding? Same-sex wedding photographs' challenge to symbolic heteronormativity', *Gender and Society*, 26(6), pp. 874 – 899
- Kincaid, E. (2020). 'Re-encountering Lefebvre: Toward a critical phenomenology of space', *Environment and Planning D*, 38(1), pp. 167 – 186
- Kirby, T. A., Merritt, S. K., and Kaiser, C. R. (2020). 'Combating Bisexual Erasure: The Correspondence of Implicit and Explicit Sexual Identity', *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, 12(8), pp. 1415 – 1424
- Kleine, D., Pearson, G., and Poveda, S. (2016). *Participatory methods: Engaging children's voices and experiences in research*. Available from: <http://globalkidsonline.net/tools/guides/participatory-research/> (Accessed: 12 May 2021)
- Klesse, C. (2021). 'Bifeminist anti-monogamy and the politics of erotic autonomy', in Baumgartner, R., and Maliepaard, E. (eds) *Bisexuality in Europe: Sexual Citizenship, Romantic Relationships, and Bi+ Identities*, Abingdon, Oxon.: Routledge, pp.67 – 82
- Knibbe, K., and Kupari, H. (2020). 'Theorizing lived religion: introduction', *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, 35(2), pp. 157 – 176
- Knott, K. (2008). 'Spatial Theory and the Study of Religion', *Religion Compass*, 2(6), pp. 1102 – 1116
- Koldony, D. (2000). *Blessed Bi Spirit: Bisexual People of Faith*. New York, NY: Continuum.
- Lannutti, P. J. (2008). "'This is Not a Lesbian Wedding": Examining Same-Sex Marriage and Bisexual-Lesbian Couples', *Journal of Bisexuality*, 7(3-4), pp. 237 – 260
- Lapinski, J., and McKirnan, D. (2013). 'Forgive Me Father for I Have Sinned: The Role of a Christian Upbringing on Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Identity Development', *Journal of Homosexuality*, 60(6), pp. 853 – 872
- Lawton, S. for The Conversation (2019). *Eastenders: arrival of a bisexual character is welcome – if the stereotypes can be avoided*. Available at: <https://theconversation.com/eastenders-arrival-of-a-bisexual-character-is-welcome-if-the-stereotypes-can-be-avoided-123412> (Accessed: 10th July 2023)
- Lefebvre, H. (1974). *La Production de l'Espace*. Germany: Éditions Anthropos.
- (1991). *The Production of Space: translated by Donald Nicholson-Smith*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Blackwell.
- Legislation.gov.uk (2013) *Church of England Marriage Measure 2008*. Available at: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukcm/2008/1/section/1> (Accessed: 23rd October 2023)
- Levy, D. (2013). 'On the Outside Looking In? The Experience of Being a Straight, Cisgender Qualitative Researcher', *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Social Services*, 25(2), pp. 197 – 209
- Levy, D., and Harr, L. (2018). "'I never felt like there was a place for me:" Experiences of Bisexual and

- Pansexual Individuals with a Christian Upbringing', *Journal of Bisexuality*, 28(2), pp. 186 – 205
- Liefbroer, A. C., and Rijken, A. J. (2019). 'The Association Between Christianity and Marriage Attitudes in Europe. Does Religious Context Matter?', *European Sociological Review*, 35(3), pp.363 – 379
- Lin, L. (2009). 'Data management and security in qualitative research', *Dimens Crit Care Nurs*, 28(3), pp. 132 – 137
- Lingwood, S. (2010). 'Bi Christian Unitarian: A Theology of Transgression', *Journal of Bisexuality*, 10(1-2), pp. 31 – 43
- Lobato, L., Bethony, J. M., Pereira, F. B., Grahek, S. L., Diemert, D., and Gazzinelli, M. F. (2014). 'Impact of gender on the decision to participate in a clinical trial: a cross-sectional study', *BMC Public Health*, 14, pp. 1 – 9
- Lochmiller, C. R. (2021). 'Conducting Thematic Analysis with Qualitative Data', *The Qualitative Report*, 26(6), pp. 2029 – 2044
- Loughlin, G. (2008). *Alien Sex: The Body and Desire in Cinema and Theology*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
- Lupton, D. (2022). 'Socio-spatialities and affective atmospheres of Covid-19: A visual essay', *Thesis Eleven*, 172(12), pp. 36 – 65
- MacLeod, M. A., Bauer, G. R., Robinson, M., MacKay, J., and Ross, L. E. (2015). 'Biphobia and Anxiety Among Bisexuals in Ontario, Canada', *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Mental Health*, 19(3), pp. 217 – 243
- Magrath, R., Cleland, J., and Anderson, E. (2017). 'Bisexual Erasure in the British Print Media: Representation of Tom Daley's Coming Out', *Journal of Bisexuality*, 17(3), pp. 300 – 317
- Maliepaard, E. (2018). 'Disclosing Bisexuality or Coming Out? Two Different Realities for Bisexual People in The Netherlands', *Journal of Bisexuality*, 18(2), pp. 145 – 167
- Maliepaard, E. (2021). 'The bisexual movement in the Netherlands: Developments and experiences of key bi activists since the 1990s', in Baumgartner, R., and Maliepaard, E. (eds.) *Bisexuality in Europe: Sexual Citizenship, Romantic Relationships, and Bi+ Identities*, Abingdon, Oxon.: Routledge, pp. 36 – 50
- Manning, J. (2016). 'Queer Theory', in Goldberg, A. (ed.) *The SAGE Encyclopedia of LGBTQ Studies*, Thousand Oaks: Sage, pp. 915 – 918
- Manolache, S. (2017). 'The dialogue between sacred, symbol and ritual to Mircea Eliade's thinking', *Dialogo*, 4(1), pp. 101 – 107
- Marchini, S., Zaurino, E., Bouziotis, J., Brondino, N., Delvenne, V., and Delhay, M. (2020). 'Study

of resilience and loneliness in youth(18–25 years old) during the COVID-19pandemic lockdown measures’, *Journal of Community Psychology*, 49(2), pp. 468 – 480

Marín-González, E., Malmusi, D., Camprubí, L., and Borrell, C. (2017). ‘The Role of Dissemination as a Fundamental Part of a Research Project: Lessons Learned from SOPHIE’, *International Journal of Health Services*, 47(2), pp. 258 – 276

Massey, D. (2005). *For Space*. London: SAGE Publications Inc.

Masson, F., and Nkosi, S. (2017). ‘Christianity and homosexuality: contradictory or complementary? A qualitative study of the experiences of Christian homosexual university students’, *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 31(4), pp. 72 – 93

Mathers, L., Sumerau, J., and Cragun, R. (2018). ‘The Limits of Homonormativity: Constructions of Bisexual and Transgender People in the Post-Gay Era’, *Gender and Sexualities*, 61(6), pp. 934 – 952

Mayberry, D., Reupert, A., Bartholemew, C., Cuff, R., Duncan, Z., McAuliffe, C., McLean, L., Pettenuzzo, L., Swing, A., and Foster, K. (2021). ‘An online intervention for 18–25-year-old youth whose parents have a mental illness and/or substance use disorder: A pilot randomized controlled trial’, *Early Intervention in Psychiatry*, 16(11), pp. 1249 – 1258

McAllum, M-A. (2018). ‘Young bisexual women's experiences in secondary schools: “Not everyone's straight so why are they only teaching that?”’, *Sex Education*, 18(3), pp. 253 – 267

McConnell, G., and Mitchell, C. (2011). *LGBT Communities’ Experiences of Faith and Church in Northern Ireland*. Available at:

https://pureadmin.qub.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/161449895/LGBT_Experiences_of_Faith_and_Church_in_N.I._Report.pdf (Accessed: 02nd July 2022)

McCormick, N. (1994). *Sexual salvation: Affirming women’s sexual rights and pleasures*. Westport, CT: Praeger.

McDonald, K. E., Kidney, C. A., and Patka, M. (2013). ‘“You need to let your voice be heard”: research participants’ views on research’, *Journal of Intellectual Disability Research*, 57(3), pp.216 – 225

McGeorge, C. R., Carlson, T. S., and Toomey, R. B. (2015). ‘Assessing Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Affirmative Training in Couple and Family Therapy: Establishing the Validity of the Faculty Version of the Affirmative Training Inventory’, *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 41(1), pp. 57 – 71

McGuire, M. (2008). *Lived Religion: Faith and Practice in Everyday Life*. Oxford: Oxford University Press,

McLean, K. (2004). ‘Negotiating (non)monogamy: bisexuality and intimate relationships’, *Journal of Bisexuality*, 4(1-2), pp. 85 – 97

McLean, K. (2007). ‘Hiding in the closet? Bisexuals, coming out and the disclosure imperative’, *Journal of Sociology*, 43(2), pp. 151 – 166

- McNeill J. J. (1976). *The Church and the Homosexual*. Kansas City, KS: Sheed Andrews and MCMeel Ltd.
- McQueeney, K. (2009). ‘“We are God’s Children, Y’All: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in Lesbian-and Gay-Affirming Congregations’, *Social Problems*, 56(1), pp. 151 – 173
- Meades, P. (2023). ‘An exploration of lesbian and gay people’s experiences of religion, and their implications for psychotherapy: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)’, *European Journal of Psychotherapy & Counselling*, 25(1-2), pp. 159 – 178
- Meek, J. (2014). ‘Conversations with God: Reconciling Religious Identities with Sexual Identities among Gay and Bisexual Men in Scotland, 1950–1999’, in Taylor, Y., and Snowdon, R. (eds). *Queering Religion, Religious Queers*. London: Routledge, pp. 101 – 116
- The Methodist Church (2024). *The Methodist Church*. Available at: <https://www.methodist.org.uk/> (Accessed: 09 March 2024)
- Miller, S. J., and Stack, K. (2014). ‘African-American Lesbian and Queer Women Respond to Christian-based Homophobia’, *Journal of GLBT Family Studies*, 10(3), pp. 243 – 268
- Miller, R.M., and Minton, C. A. B. (2016). ‘Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis: A Contemporary Phenomenological Approach’, *Journal of Mental Health Counselling*, 38(1), pp. 47 – 61
- Minnix, G. G. (2018). ‘Reconciling Counselors’ Christian Beliefs and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Affirmation: A Grounded Theory’, *Counseling and Values*, 63(1), pp. 110 – 128
- Moberg, M., Sjö, S., Kwaku Golo, B-W., Gökçe, H. E., Hart, R. F., and Cardenas, S. C. (2019). ‘From socialization to self-socialization? Exploring the role of digital media in the religious lives of young adults in Ghana, Turkey, and Peru’, *Religion*, 49(2), pp. 240 – 261
- Mosurska, A. (2021). ‘The reflective research diary: a tool for more ethical and engaged disaster research’, *Disaster Prevention and Management: An International Journal*, 31(1), pp. 51 – 59
- Murniasih, F., and Sabina, N. D. (2024). ‘Exploring Religious Identity and Wellbeing of Generation Z: Mediating Role of Digital Engagement’, *Journal Diversita*, 10(2), pp. 271 – 280
- Murphy, J., Jones, F. W., Nigbur, D., and Gee, K. (2022). ‘Living in a World With God: An Interpretative Phenomenological Exploration of the Religious Experiences of Five Baptists in Britain’, *Europe’s Journal of Psychology*, 18(2), pp. 154 – 167
- Murphy, J., Jones, F. W., and Nigbur, D. (2023). ‘Allah has told us everything: An interpretative phenomenological analysis exploring the lived experiences of British Muslims’, *Archive for the Psychology of Religion*, 45(2), pp. 133 – 151
- Murr, R. (2013). ‘“I Became Proud of Being Gay and Proud of Being Christian”: The Spiritual Journeys of Queer Christian Women, *Journal of Religion & Spirituality in Social Work: SocialThought*, 32(4),

pp. 349 – 372

National LGBT Survey (gov.uk) (2018). *National LGBT Survey: Research report*. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-lgbt-survey-summary-report> (Accessed: 12th September 2023)

Nelson, R., (2020). ‘Questioning identities/shifting identities: the impact of researching sex and gender on a researcher’s LGBT+ identity’, *Qualitative Research*, 20(6), pp. 910 – 926

Nelson, R. (2024). ‘Deconstructing the Clinging Myth of ‘Straight-Passing privilege for bi+ People’, *Journal of Bisexuality*, 24(3), pp. 303 – 324

Nicholls, G., for Affinity.org.uk (2021). *A letter to the UK government: Response to the consultation on banning ‘conversion therapy’*. Available at: <https://www.affinity.org.uk/news/1033-a-letter-to-the-uk-government-response-to-the-consultation-on-banning-aconversion-therapy> (Accessed: 10th July 2023)

Nijhawan, L. P., Janodia, M D., Muddukrishna, B. S., Bhat, K. M., Bairy, K. L., Udupa, N., and Musmade, P. B. (2013). ‘Informed consent: Issues and challenges’, *J. Adv. Pharm. Technol. Res.*4(3), pp. 134 – 140

Nitsche, M. (2017). ‘A Place of Encounter with a Divine. Heidegger on the Spatiality of Religious Experience’, *Open Theology*, 3, pp. 338 – 344

Nixon, G., Singgih, E G., Natar, A. N., Mayliasari, T., and Thayeb, K. N. (2023). ‘“It Was A Gift”: Indonesian Christian Bisexual Seminary Students’ Theological Reinterpretation of Bisexuality and Religious Belief’, *Journal of Bisexuality*, 23(3), pp. 250 – 274

Nuzum, D., Meaney, S., O’Donoghue, K., and Jackson, M. (2017). ‘Stillbirth and Suffering in Ireland: A Theological Reflection from Healthcare Chaplaincy’, *Practical Theology*, 10(2), pp. 187 – 200

Nyumba, T. O, Wilson, K., Derrick, C., and Mukherjee, N. (2018). ‘The use of focus group discussion methodology: Insights from two decades of application in conservation’, *Methods in Ecology and Evolution*, 9(1), pp. 20 – 32

O’Brien, J. (2004). ‘Wrestling the Angel of contradiction: Queer Christian Identities’, *Culture and Religion*, 5(2), pp. 179 – 202

O’Brien, J. (2014). ‘Outing Religion in LGBT Studies’, in Taylor, Y., and Snowdon, R. (eds). *Queering Religion, Religious Queers*. London: Routledge, pp. xi – xxii

Ochs, R. (1996). ‘Biphobia: it goes more than two ways’, in Firestein, B. (ed). *Bisexuality: The Psychology and Politics of an Invisible Minority*. California: Sage Publications Inc., pp. 217 – 239

Ochs, R. (2009). *Rec-og-nize: The Voices of Bisexual Men*. Boston, MA: Bisexual Resource Center.

Office for National Statistics (2022). *Religion, England and Wales: Census 2021*. Available at:

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/religion/bulletins/religionenglandandwales/census2021> (Accessed: 14th January 2024)

OneBodyOneFaith (2023). *About Us*. Available at: <https://www.onebodyonefaith.org.uk/about-us/> (Accessed: 12th July 2023)

Open Table (2023). *Our vision, mission and values*. Available at: <https://opentable.lgbt/our-vision-mission-values> (Accessed: 12th July 2023)

Orson, V. (2017). 'Girlfriend wanted: Bisexuals need not apply', in Nickodemus, L., and Desmond, E. (eds). *The Bi-Ble: Personal narratives and essays about bisexuality*. Edinburgh: Monstrous Regiment Publishing Ltd., pp. 103 – 112

Oxford Learner's Dictionary, (2020). *Ambiguous*. Available at: https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/american_english/ambiguous (Accessed: 12th October 2020)

Ozanne Foundation (2018). *Faith and Sexuality Survey 2018*. Available at: <https://ozanne.foundation/2018-national-faith-sexuality-survey-results/> (Accessed 10th July 2023)

Ozanne, J. (2023). *One side of the CofE preaches LGBT+ acceptance, the other says I'm going to hell. This can't go on*. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2023/feb/03/church-of-england-excluding-lgbt-people-equal-marriage> (Accessed 4th April 2023)

Page, S., and Yip, A. K. T. (2012). 'Religious young adults recounting the past: narrating sexual and religious cultures in school', *Journal of Beliefs & Values*, 33(3), pp. 405 – 415

Page, S., and Yip, A. K. T. (2020). *Intersecting Religion and Sexuality: Sociological Perspectives*. Leiden, NL: Brill.

Page, S., and Yip, A. K. T. (2021). 'Navigating Youth Transitions as a Buddhist: Privilege, Reflexivity and Sexuality', *Journal of Global Buddhism*, 22(2), pp. 380 – 398

Page, J., Broady, T., Kumar, S., and de Leeuw, E. (2022). 'Exploratory Visuals and Text in Qualitative Research Interviews: How Do We Respond?', *International journal of Qualitative Methods*, 21(1), pp. 1 – 14

Parish, H. (2020). 'The Absence of Presence and the Presence of Absence: Social Distancing, Sacraments, and the Virtual Religious Community during the COVID-19 Pandemic', *Religions*, 11, pp. 1 – 13

Pemberton, J. (2023). [Twitter] 18 January. Available at: <https://twitter.com/JCBPemberton/status/1615715532497354752?s=20> (Accessed: 17th April 2023)

Pennasilico, A. (2019). 'The Invisi_les: Biphobia, Bisexual Erasure and Their Impact on Mental Health', *Editoriale Scientifica*, 4(1), pp. 22 – 28

Perry, C., Thurston, M., and Green, K. (2004). 'Involvement and Detachment in Researching Sexuality:

- Reflections on the Process of Semistructured Interviewing', *Qualitative Health Research*, 14(1), pp. 135 – 148
- Persson, T. J., and Pfaus, J. G. (2015). 'Bisexuality and Mental Health: Future Research Directions', *Journal of Bisexuality*, 15(1), pp. 82 – 98
- Phillips, M., and Lu, J. (2018). 'A quick look at NVivo', *Journal of Electronic Resources Librarianship*, 39(2), pp. 104 – 106
- Pillay, J. (2020). 'COVID-19 Shows the Need to Make Church More Flexible', *Transformation*, 37(4), pp. 266 – 275
- Pinto, A., Rodriguez, A., and Smith, J. (2022). 'Researching sensitive topics in healthcare', *Evid Based Nurs*, 25(2), pp. 41 – 43
- Pollitt, A. M., Mernitz, S. E., Russell, S. T., Curran, M. A., and Toomey, R. B. (2021). 'Heteronormativity in the Lives of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Queer Young People', *Journal of Homosexuality*, 68(3), pp. 522 – 544
- Poobalan, A., Aucott, L. S., Clarke, A., and Smith, W. (2012). 'Physical activity attitudes, intentions and behaviour among 18–25 year olds: A mixed method study', *BMC Public Health*, 12, pp. 640 – 650
- Poobalan, A., Aucott, L. S., Clarke, A., and Smith, W. (2014). 'Diet behaviour among young people in transition to adulthood (18–25 yearolds): a mixed method study', *Health Psychology & Behavioural Medicine*, 2(1), pp. 909 – 928
- Prest, D. (2016). *Lesbians and Space: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis*. PhD thesis. University of Ottawa.
- Pui-Lan, K. (2021). *Postcolonial Politics and Theology: Unraveling Empire for a Global World*. St Louisville, KY: Presbyterian Publishing Corporation.
- Quakers in Britain (2016). *What do Quakers think about homosexuality?* Available at: <http://www.quaker.org.uk/Templates/Internal.asp?NodeID=89744> (Accessed: 14th July 2023)
- Quaker.org (2023). *Quakers and same-sex marriage*. Available at: <https://www.quaker.org.uk/about-quakers/our-history/marriage-equality> (Accessed: 10th July 2023)
- Rabionet, S. E. (2011). 'How I learned to design and conduct semi-structured interviews: an ongoing and continuous journey', *The Qualitative Report*, 16(2), pp. 563 - 566
- Radojcic, C. (2016). 'Building a Dignified Identity: An Ethnographic Case Study of LGBT Catholics', *Journal of Homosexuality*, 63(10), pp. 1297 – 1313
- Raley, A. B., and Lucas, J. L. (2008). 'Stereotype or Success? Prime-Time Television's Portrayal of Gay Male, Lesbian, and Bisexual Characters', *Journal of Homosexuality*, 51(2), pp. 19 – 38

Religion Media Centre (2019). *Factsheet: Glossary of Church of England terms*. Available at: <https://religionmediacentre.org.uk/factsheets/church-of-england-glossary/> (Accessed: 12th March 2024)

Religion Media Centre (2022). *Factsheet: Sexuality timeline in the Church of England*. Available at: <https://religionmediacentre.org.uk/factsheets/factsheet-sexuality-timeline-in-the-church-of-england/> (Accessed: 27th July 2023)

Religion Media Centre (2023). [Twitter] 18 January. Available at: <https://twitter.com/RelMedCentre/status/1615684180968366080?s=20> (Accessed: 17th April 2023)

Rennie, B. S. (2007). 'Mircea Eliade and the Perception of the Sacred in the Profane: Intention, Reduction, and Cognitive Theory', *The Finnish Society for the Study of Religion*, 43(1), pp. 73 –98

Rice, M., and Broome, M. E. (2004). 'Incentives for Children in Research', *Journal of Nursing Scholarship*, 36(2), pp. 167 – 172

Rich, A. C. (1980). *Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence*. London: Onlywomen press.

Roberts, K. (2014). *Convenience Sampling through Facebook*. Available at: <https://methods.sagepub.com/case/convenience-sampling-through-facebook> (Accessed: 14 February 2024)

Roberts, T. S., Horne, S. G., and Hoyt, W. T. (2015). 'Between a Gay and a Straight Place: Bisexual Individuals' Experiences with Monosexism', *Journal of Bisexuality*, 15(4), pp. 554 –569

Roberts, T., Roberts, L., Carpenter, Z., Haueisen, S., Jones, A., Schutte, K., and Smith, T. (2022). 'Existing in the void: an interpretative phenomenological analysis of rural LGBTQ+ students', *Journal of LGBT Youth*, pp. 1 – 29

Robinson, M. (2014). 'Bisexual people', in Thatcher, A (ed.) *The Oxford Handbook of Theology, Sexuality and Gender*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 640 – 657

Rodriguez, E. M., and Ouelette, S. (2000). 'Gay and Lesbian Christians: Homosexual and Religious Identity Integration in the Members and Participants of a Gay Positive Church', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 39(3), pp. 333 – 347

Rodríguez, J. M. (2022). 'Queer Politics, Bisexual Erasure: Sexuality at the Nexus of Race, Gender and Statistics', *UC Berkeley*. Available at: <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/8hv987pn> (Accessed: 24th July 2023)

Rogers, J. (2009). *Jesus, the Bible, and Homosexuality, Revised and Expanded Edition*. Louisville, KY: Presbyterian Publishing Corporation.

Romero, M. (2024). *Introducing Intersectionality*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Room, A. (1986). *A dictionary of true etymologies*. Abingdon, Oxon.: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

- Roop, N. P. (2014). *Transgender students in higher education: An IPA study of experiences and access of transgender students*. PhD thesis. Northeastern University.
- Rosario, M., Schrimshaw, E. W., and Hunter, J. (2011). 'Different Patterns of Sexual Identity Development over Time: Implications for the Psychological Adjustment of Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Youths', *Journal of Sex Research*, 48(1), pp. 3 – 15
- Ross, L., Dobinson, C., and Eady, A. (2010). 'Perceived Determinants of Mental Health for Bisexual People: A Qualitative Examination', *American Journal of Public Health*, 100(3), pp. 496 – 502
- Rubin, G. (1975). Rubin, Gayle. 'The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex', in Lewin, E. (ed.) *Feminist Anthropology, a Reader*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd (2006), pp. 33 – 52
- Sadgrove, J., Vanderbeck, R. M., Ward, K., Valentine, G., and Andersson, J. (2010). 'Constructing the boundaries of Anglican orthodoxy: An analysis of the Global Anglican Future Conference (GAFCON)', *Religion*, 40(3), pp. 193 – 206
- Sanders, C. J. (2020). *Christianity, LGBTQ Suicide, and the Souls of Queer Folk*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.
- Santhosh, L., Rojas, J. C., and Lyons, P. G. (2021). 'Zooming into Focus Groups: Strategies for Qualitative Research in the Era of Social Distancing', *ATS Scholar*, 2(2), pp. 176 – 184
- Schaefer, G. O., and Wertheimer, A. (2010). 'The right to Withdraw from Research', *Kennedy Institute of Ethics Journal*, 20(4), pp. 329 – 352
- Scherrer, K., Kazyak, E., and Schmitz, R. (2015). 'Getting "Bi" in the Family: Bisexual People's Disclosure Experiences', *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 77(3), pp. 680 – 696
- Schlossberg, L. (2001). 'Introduction: Rites of Passing', in Sánchez, M. C., and Schlossberg, L. (eds.) *Passing: Identity and Interpretation in Sexuality, Race and Religion*, New York: New York University Press, pp. 1 – 12
- Schmid, C. (2022). *Henri Lefebvre and the Theory of the Production of Space*. New York City, NY: Verso.
- Schnoor, R. F. (2006). 'Being Gay and Jewish: Negotiating Intersecting Identities', *Sociology of Religion*, 67(1), pp. 43 – 60
- Seal, D. W., Bogart, L. M., and Ehrhardt, A. E. (1998). 'Small Group Dynamics: The Utility of Focus Group Discussions as a Research Method', *Group Dynamics: Theory, Research, and Practice*, 2(4), pp. 253 – 266
- Seif, R. (2017). 'The Media Representation of Fictional Gay and Lesbian Characters on Television: A Qualitative Analysis of U.S. TV-series regarding Heteronormativity'. Master's thesis. Jönköping

University.

Semlyen, J., Ali, A., and Flowers, P. (2017). 'Intersectional identities and dilemmas in interactions with healthcare professionals: an interpretative phenomenological analysis of British Muslim gaymen', *Cult Health Sex.*, 20(9), pp. 1023 – 1035

Serhan, D. (2020). 'Transitioning from face-to-face to remote learning: Students' attitudes and perceptions of using zoom during COVID-19 pandemic', *Int. J. Technol. Educ. Sci.* 4(1), pp. 335 – 342

Sharpe, K. (2011). *The Gay Gospels: Good News for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered People*. Alresford: John Hunt Publishing.

Shaw, J. (2014). 'Conflicts within the Anglican Communion', in Thatcher, A. (ed). *The Oxford Handbook of Theology, Sexuality and Gender*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 340 – 357

Shaw, J. (2022). *Bi: The hidden culture, history, and science of bisexuality*. Edinburgh: Canongate Books Ltd.

Shepherd, C. (2017). *Bisexual Christians and Mental Health: Why the Church needs to be more welcoming*. PhD thesis. University of Winchester.

Shepherd, C. (2019). *Bisexuality and the Western Christian Church: The Damage of Silence*. Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland.

Shepherd, C. (2020). *Bi: The Way: Pastoring Bisexual Christians in Europe*. Easy Yoke Publishing.

Shepherd, C. (2021). 'Monosexual church policies and plurisexual youth cultures', in Baumgartner, R., and Maliepaard, E. (eds) *Bisexuality in Europe: Sexual Citizenship, Romantic Relationships, and Bi+ Identities*, Abingdon, Oxon.: Routledge, pp. 51 – 66

Sherwood, D. (2017a). 'Dealing Competently, Ethically, and Faithfully with Hard Issues: The Difficult but Necessary Road', *Social Work & Christianity*, 44(1-2), pp. 3 – 10

Sherwood, H. (2017b). 'C of E bishops refuse to change stance on gay marriage', *The Guardian*, 27th Jan. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jan/27/church-of-england-bishops-marriage-doctrine-talks?utm> (Accessed: 4th April 2025)

Sherwood, H. (2020). 'Sex is for married heterosexual couples only, says Church of England', *The Guardian*, 23rd Jan. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jan/23/sex-married-heterosexual-couples-church-of-england-christians> (Accessed: 25th October 2020)

Sherwood, H. (2023). 'Church of England votes in favour of blessings for same-sex unions', *The Guardian*, 9th Feb. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/feb/09/church-of-england-votes-in-favour-of-blessings-for-same-sex-unions> (Accessed: 01 March 2023)

Shinebourne, P. (2011). 'The Theoretical Underpinnings of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)', *Existential Analysis*, 22(1), pp. 16 – 31

- Shugart, H. A. (2010). 'Reinventing Privilege: The New (Gay) Man in Contemporary Popular Media', *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 20(1), pp. 67 – 91
- Siraj, A. (2015). 'British Muslim lesbians: reclaiming Islam and reconfiguring religious identity', *Cont Islam*, 10, pp. 185 – 200
- Small, A. (2018). 'From conflict to consensus: Reconciling the right to freedom of religion and LGBT rights', *Alternative Law Journal*, 43(3), pp. 221 – 224
- Smith, M. D. (1996). 'Ancient Bisexuality and the Interpretation of Romans 1:26-27', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 64(2), pp. 223 – 256
- Smith, J. A., & Osborn, M. (2003). 'Interpretative phenomenological analysis' in J. A. Smith (ed.) *Qualitative psychology: A practical guide to research methods*. California: Sage Publications Inc., pp. 51–80
- Smith, B., and Horne, S. (2007). 'Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgendered (GLBT) Experiences with Earth-Spirited Faith', *Journal of Homosexuality*, 52(3-4), pp. 235 – 248
- Smith, J. A., Flower, P., and Larkin, M. (2022). *Interpretative phenomenological analysis: theory, method and research*. London: Sage Publishing Inc.
- Soja, E. (1996). *Thirdspace*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Publishers.
- Soltis, J. F. (1989). 'The ethics of qualitative research', *Qualitative Studies in Education*, 2(2), pp.123 – 130
- Spalding, L. R., and Peplau, L. A. (1997). 'The Unfaithful Lover: Heterosexuals' Perceptions of Bisexuals and Their Relationships', *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 21, p. 611 – 625
- Spickard, J. V. (2011). 'Phenomenology', in Engler, S., and Stausberg, M (eds.) *The Routledge Handbook of Research Methods in the Study of Religion*. London: Taylor and Francis Group, pp. 333 – 345
- Spiers, J., and Riley, R. (2019). 'Analysing one dataset with two qualitative methods: The distress of general practitioners, a thematic and interpretative phenomenological analysis', *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 16(2), pp. 276 – 290
- Springtide Research Institute (2022). *Gen Z and Religion – What the Statistics Say*. Available at: <https://springtideresearch.org/post/religion-and-spirituality/gen-z-and-religion-what-the-statistics-say> (Accessed: 20th February 2025)
- Stone, K. (2014). 'Marriage and Sexual Relations in the World of the Hebrew Bible', in Thatcher, A. (ed.) *The Oxford Handbook of Theology, Sexuality and Gender*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 173 – 188
- Stonewall (no date). *Everything you need to know about conversion therapy*. Available at:

<https://www.stonewall.org.uk/everything-you-need-know-about-conversion-therapy> (Accessed: 10th July 2023)

Stonewall (2017a). *School Report (2017)*. Available at: <https://www.stonewall.org.uk/school-report-2017> (Accessed: 10th July 2023)

Stonewall (2017b). *LGBT in Britain – Hate Crime and Discrimination*. Available at: https://www.stonewall.org.uk/system/files/lgbt_in_britain_hate_crime.pdf (Accessed: 12th July 2023)

Stonewall (2018). *Celebrating Bi Inclusion in Secondary Schools*. Available at: <https://www.stonewall.org.uk/resources/celebrating-bi-inclusion-secondary-schools> (Accessed: 10th July 2023)

Stonewall. (2020). *LGBT in Britain – Bi Report (2020)*. Available at: <https://www.stonewall.org.uk/resources/lgbt-britain-bi-report-2020> (Accessed: 13th September 2023)

Stratton, S. J. (2021). ‘Population Research: Convenience Sampling Strategies’, *Prehospital and Disaster Medicine*, 36(4), pp. 373 – 374

Student Christian Movement (2020). *A response to the Church of England’s ‘Living in Love and Faith’ resources*. Available at: <https://www.movement.org.uk/blog/response-church-england> (Accessed 23rd February 2021)

Student Christian Movement (2023). *Affirming Christianity: How to be a Good Christian Ally*. Birmingham: Student Christian Movement.

Student Christian Movement (2024). *[Twitter]* 23 February. Available at: https://twitter.com/SCM_Britain/status/1762065005099233628 (Accessed: 1st March 2024).

Sumerau, J. E. (2017). “‘Some of Us Are Good, God-Fearing Folks’”: Justifying Religious Participation in an LGBT Christian Church’, *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 46(1), pp. 3 – 29

Tamale, S. (2014). ‘Exploring the contours of African sexualities: religion, law and power’, *African Human Rights Law Journal*, 14(1), pp. 150 – 177

Taylor, Y. (2016). *Making space for queer-identifying religious youth*. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK.

Taylor, J. (2018). ‘Bisexual Mental Health: A Call to Action’, *Issues in Mental Health Nursing*, 39(1), pp. 83 – 92

Taylor, J., Power, J., Smith, E., and Rathbone, M. (2019). ‘Bisexual mental health: Findings from the ‘Who I Am’ study’, *Australian Journal of General Practice*, 48(3), pp. 138 - 144

Thatcher, A. (1993). *Liberating Sex: A Christian Sexual Theology*. London: SPCK.

Thatcher, A. (1999). *Marriage After Modernity: Christian Marriage in Postmodern Times*. New York: NYU Press.

Thatcher, A. (2011). *God, Sex and Gender: An Introduction*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell.

Thatcher, A. (2020) *Living in Love and Faith*. Available at: <https://modernchurch.org.uk/adrian-thatcher-living-in-love-and-faith> (Accessed: 27th July 2023)

Thinking Anglicans (2012). *CofE's Osborne report finally published*. Available at: <https://www.thinkinganglicans.org.uk/5323-2/> (Accessed: 27th July 2023)

Thorpe, A. S. (2014). 'Doing the Right Thing or Doing the Thing Right: Implications of Participant Withdrawal', *Organizational Research Methods*, 17(3), pp. 255 – 277

Todd, M. E., Oravecz, L., and Vejar, C. (2016). 'Biphobia in the Family Context: Experiences and Perceptions of Bisexual Individuals', *Journal of Bisexuality*, 16(2), pp. 144 – 162

Toft, A. (2009). 'Bisexual Christians: The Life-Stories of a Marginalised Community', in Hunt, S. (ed.) *Contemporary Christianity and LGBT Sexualities*. Abingdon, Oxon.: Routledge, pp. 67 – 87

Toft, A. (2011). *Bisexual Christian identity: a sociological exploration of the life stories of female and male bisexual Christians*. PhD thesis, University of Nottingham.

Toft, A. (2012). 'Bisexuality and Christianity: Negotiating Disparate Identities', in Hunt, S., and Yip, A. K. T. (eds) *The Ashgate Research Companion to Contemporary Religion and Sexuality*. Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, pp. 189 – 209

Toft, A. (2014). 'Re-imagining bisexuality and Christianity: The negotiation of Christianity in the lives of bisexual women and men', *Sexualities*, 17(5/6), pp. 546 – 564

Toft, A. (2016). 'Bisexual Christians: The Life Stories of a Marginalised Community', in Hunt, S.(ed). *Contemporary Christianity and LGBT Sexualities*. London: Routledge, pp. 67 – 86

Toft, A. (2020a). 'Exploring the Intersection of Bisexual and Christian Identities: The Negotiation of Gendered Attraction in Intimate Lives', in Page, S-J., and Yip, A. K. T. (eds). *Intersecting Religion and Identity: Sociological Perspectives*. Leiden, NL: Brill, pp. 145 – 167

Toft, A. (2020b). 'Negotiating sexuality and spirituality: the lived experiences of bisexual persons', in Yip, A. K. T., and Toft, A. (eds). *Bisexuality, Religion and Spirituality: Sociological Perspectives*. London: Routledge, pp. 99 – 114

Torres, C. A., and Rodrigues, D. L. (2021). 'Heteronormative Beliefs and Internalized Homonegativity in the Coming Out Process of Portuguese and Turkish Sexual Minority Men', *Sexuality Research and Social Policy*, 19, pp. 663 – 677

Törrönen, J. (2002). 'Semiotic theory on qualitative interviewing using stimulus texts', *Qualitative Research*, 2002, 2(3), pp. 343 – 362

- Tuan, Y-F. (1977). *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Tucker, J. D., Nelei-Nunnemaker, C. G., and Scnalan, K. L. (2021). 'The Queer Experience of School Counselors: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis', *Professional School Counseling*, 25(1), pp. 1 – 13
- United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. (2019). *Catechism of the Catholic Church: Revised in accordance with the official Latin text promulgated by Pope John Paul II*. 2nd edn. Washington: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops – Libreria Editrice Vaticana.
- United Nations (2024). *Youth*. Available at: <https://www.un.org/en/global-issues/youth> (Accessed: 27th February 2025)
- Van Eck, E. (2020). 'A theology of marriage: A biblical or a cultural construct?', *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies*, 76(4), pp. 1 – 8
- Vasey, M. (1995). *Strangers and Friends: A New Exploration of Homosexuality and the Bible*. London: Hodder & Stoughton.
- Vasileiou, K., Barnett, J., Thorpe, S., and Young, T. (2018). 'Characterising and justifying sample size sufficiency in interview-based studies: systematic analysis of qualitative health research over a 15-year period', *BMC Medical Research Methodology*, 18, pp. 1 – 18
- Vernallis, K. (1999). 'Bisexual Monogamy: Twice the Temptation but Half the Fun?', *Journal of Social Philosophy*, 30(3), pp. 347 – 368
- Village, A. (2025). 'A survey of provinces in the Anglican Communion that have allowed same-sex blessings or same-sex marriages', *Journal of Anglican Studies*,. Published online, pp. 1 – 29
- Voss, G., Browne, K., and Gupta, C. (2014). 'Embracing the 'And': Between queer and bisexual theory at Brighton BiFest', *Journal of Homosexuality*, 61(11), pp. 1605 – 1625
- Vosyliūtė, A. (2007). 'Thinking about religious space', *Filosofija Sociologija*, 18(4), pp. 95 – 104
- Wakefield, L for Pink News (2021). *Pope Francis shuts down any hope for same-sex marriage in Catholic Church once and for all*. Available at: <https://www.thepinknews.com/2021/09/17/pope-francis-catholic-church-same-sex-marriage/> (Accessed: 10th July 2023)
- Wandrey, R. L., Mosack, K. E., and Moore, E. M. (2015). 'Coming Out to Family and Friends as Bisexually Identified Young Adult Women: A Discussion of Homophobia, Biphobia, and Heteronormativity', *Journal of Bisexuality*, 15(2), pp. 204 – 229
- Warner, M. (1993). *Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

Warner, M. (2017). “‘Therefore a Man Leaves His Father and His Mother and Clings to His Wife’”: Marriage and Intermarriage in Genesis 2:24’, *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 136(2), pp. 269 – 288

Warner, M. (2022). *Marriage and the Attractions between Men and Women in Genesis 2:24*. Available at: <https://books.bibleodyssey.org/articles/marriage-and-the-attraction-between-men-and-women-in-genesis-224/> (Accessed: 22 October 2023)

Weinberg, M. S., Williams, C. J., and Pryor, D. W. (1995). *Dual Attraction: Understanding Bisexuality*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Weiss, J. T. (2004). ‘GL vs. BT: The Archaeology of Biphobia and Transphobia Within the U.S. Gay and Lesbian Community’, *Journal of Bisexuality*, 3(1), pp. 25 – 55

Welsh, E. (2002). ‘Dealing with Data: Using NVivo in the Qualitative Data Analysis Process’, *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung*, 3(2), no page range

Welzer-Lang, D. (2008). ‘Speaking Out Loud About Bisexuality: Biphobia in the Gay and Lesbian Community’, *Journal of Bisexuality*, 8(1-2), pp. 81 – 95

White, A. J., Magrath, R., and Thomas, B. (2018). ‘The experiences of lesbian, gay and bisexual students and staff at a Further Education college in South East England’, *British Educational Research Journal*, 44(3), pp. 480 – 495

White, J. J., Dangerfield II, D. T., Donovan, E., Miller, D., and Grieb, S. M. (2020). ‘Exploring the role of LGBT-affirming churches in health promotion for Black sexual minority men’, *Culture, Health & Sexuality*, 22(10), pp. 1191 – 1206

Wilcox, M. (2003). *Coming Out in Christianity: Religion, Identity and Community*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Wilkins, J. (2005). ‘Back from the Brink? The Windsor Report on the Anglican Communion’, *Ecclesiology*, 1(3), pp. 101-107

Wilkinson, D. (2022). ‘Does sexual identity and religious practice have implications for individual’s subjective health and wellbeing? Secondary data analysis of the Community Life Survey’, *Mental Health, Religion, and Culture*, 25(6), pp. 563 – 577

Williams, R. R. (2010). ‘Space for God: Lived Religion at Work, Home, and Play’, *Sociology of Religion*, 71(3), pp. 257 – 279

Wills, R. for collider.com (2021). *10 Bisexual Representations On TV To Watch For Pride*. Available at: <https://collider.com/bisexual-representations-on-tv-to-watch-for-pride/> (Accessed: 10th July 2023)

Wilson, B. (1994). ‘Religion and the Affirmation of Identity’, *Revista de antropologia social*, 3, pp. 111 – 126

Wood, A. W., and Conley, A. H. (2014). ‘Loss of Religious or Spiritual Identities Among the LGBT

Population', *Counseling and Values*, 59(1), pp. 95 – 111

Woodell, B., Kazyak, E., and Compton, D. (2015). 'Reconciling LGB and Christian Identities in the Rural South', *Social Sciences*, pp. 859 – 878

Woodell, B., and Schwadel, P. (2020). 'Changes in Religiosity Among Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Emerging Adults', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 59(2), pp. 379 – 396

World Health Organisation (2006). *Sexual health – definitions: 'sexuality'*. Available at: https://www.who.int/health-topics/sexual-health#tab=tab_2 (Accessed: 22nd February 2025)

World Health Organisation (2011). 'Youth and health risks: Report by the Secretariat. A64/25. Sixty-fourth World Health Assembly'. Available at: https://apps.who.int/gb/ebwha/pdf_files/WHA64/A64_25-en.pdf (Accessed: 27th February 2025)

Wrathall, M. A. (2006). 'The Revealed Word and World Disclosure: Heidegger and Pascal on the Phenomenology of Religious Faith', *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology*, 37(1), pp.75 – 88

Wright, N. T. (2014). *N. T. Wright on Gay Marriage. Nature and narrative point to complementarity, by Matthew Schmitz*. Available at: <https://www.firstthings.com/blogs/firstthoughts/2014/06/n-t-wrights-argument-against-same-sex-marriage> (Accessed: 28th October 2023)

Xue, J., Chen, J., Chen, C., Hu, R., and Zhu, T. (2020). 'The Hidden Pandemic of Family Violence During COVID-19: Unsupervised Learning of Tweets', *Journal of Medical Internet Research*, 22(11), pp. 1 – 11

Yarhouse, M. A., Morgan, T., Anthony, K and Sadusky, J., (2017). 'Celibate Gay Christians: Sexual Identity and Religious Beliefs and Practices', *Journal of Pastoral Care and Counselling*, 71(1), pp. 52 – 59

Yip, A. K. T. (2003). 'The Self as the Basis of Religious Faith: Spirituality of Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Christians', in Davie, G., Heelas, P., and Woodhead, L. (eds.) *Predicting Religion: Christian Secular and Alternative Futures*. London: Routledge, pp. 135 – 146

Yip, A. K. T. (2004). 'Same-Sex Marriage: Contrasting Perspectives among Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Christians', *Feminism & Psychology*, 14(1), pp. 173 – 180

Yip, A. K. T., and Gross M. (2010). 'Living Spirituality and Sexuality: A Comparison of Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Christians in France and Britain', *Social Compass*, 57(1), pp. 40 – 59

Yip, A. K. T., Keenan, M., and Page, S. (2011). *Religion, Youth and Sexuality: Selected Key Findings from a Multi-faith Exploration*. Nottingham: University of Nottingham.

Yip, A. K. T. (2017). 'Researching Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Christians and Muslims: Some Thematic Reflections', *Sociological Research Online*, 13(1), pp. 116 – 129

Yoshino, K. (2000). 'The Epistemic Contract of Bisexual Erasure', *Stanford Law Review*, 52(2), pp. 353 – 461

Young, P. D., and Shipley, H. (2014). 'Belief, Not Religion: Youth Negotiations of Religious Identity in Canada', in Wyn, J., and Cahill, H. (eds). *Handbook of Children and Youth Studies*. Singapore: Springer Singapore, pp. 861 – 873

Young Jr., L. (2022). 'To Condemn or Not to Condemn: Perceived Climates Concerning Sexual Orientation in Black Churches', *Sociology of Religion*, 83(2), pp. 169 – 193

Youthscape (2022). 'Influencers: Peer evangelism amongst young people in the UK'. Available at: <https://www.youthscape.co.uk/research/published-research/influencers> (Accessed: 21 February 2025)

Zutlevics, T. L. (2016). 'Could providing financial incentives to research participants be ultimately self-defeating?', *Research Ethics*, 13(2), pp. 137 – 148

Appendix A
Section 5.8 of *Issues in Human Sexuality*

‘The first is that of bisexuality. We recognise that there are those whose sexual orientation is ambiguous, and who can find themselves attracted to partners of either sex. Nevertheless it is clear that bisexual activity must always be wrong for this reason, if for no other, that it inevitably involves being unfaithful. The Church’s guidance to bisexual Christians is that if they are capable of heterosexual relationships and of satisfaction within them, they should follow the way of holiness in either celibacy or heterosexual marriage. In the situation of the bisexual it can also be that counselling will help the person concerned to discover the truth of their personality and to achieve a degree of inner healing’.

***Issues in Human Sexuality* (House of Bishops, 1991, p. 42)**

Appendix B

Recruitment documents

The following pages present the documents used within the recruitment process. The documents are presented in the following order:

Poster presented on social media
Bisexual participants 'Participant Information Sheet'
LLF participants 'Participant Information Sheet'
Bisexual participants consent form
LLF participants consent form
Bisexual participants question sheet
LLF participants question sheet
Statements of Response form

It should be noted that the bisexual participant question sheet was provided to the participants upon recruitment to the study, and therefore, before the focus group, when extra questions were added.



UNIVERSITY OF
BIRMINGHAM

Recruiting participants for focus group and interviews:

'An examination of the sexual and religious lives of bisexual+ Church of England 18 - 25-year olds through critical document analysis of Church of England policies and reflective participant interviews'

Are you a Church of England Christian? Do you identify as bisexual+?
Would you like to take part in a focus group and interview session for a PhD project?

Bisexuality is often understood as an attraction to men and women. However, those who identify as bisexual, or under the bisexual umbrella (also known as 'bisexual+'), may be attracted to more than two genders, non-binary or genderfluid individuals, or transgender individuals. *Participants may identify their bisexuality in their own way.*

Participants should affiliate their faith life to the Church of England in some way, but do not have to be baptised or confirmed. Attendance at any CofE church or group is accepted and frequency of attendance does not matter.

Individuals interested in being interviewed for the above project may contact the researcher for further information before deciding about taking part.

This project has been approved by the University's Ethics Committee.

Researcher: Harriet McInerney, PhD FT Theology and Religion, University of Birmingham

Lead supervisor:

Dr Karen Wenell

Department of Theology and Religion

Co-supervisor:

Dr Sarah Hall

Department of Education



Participant information sheet

Statement to read aloud:

I would like you to read the participant information sheet below, the statements of response sheet and the consent form. Following this, I would request that you complete the consent form. You are entitled to take part or choose not to take part in the study. Please review all the information and if you have any additional questions, please ask the researcher ahead of the study.

Research project title:

An examination of the sexual and religious lives of bisexual+ Church of England 18 - 25-year-olds through critical document analysis of Church of England policies and reflective participant interviews.

Organisation:

Researcher: Miss Harriet McInerney

Supervisor(s): Dr Karen Wenell, Dr Sarah Hall

This research will be conducted as part of my PhD in Theology and Religion at the University of Birmingham.

Who can take part?

This project is open to individuals who identify as bisexual, worship within the Church of England and are aged between 18 and 25.

Bisexual: You may have noticed in the title of my project that I have used 'bisexual+' instead of just 'bisexual'. This is because some people may identify as bisexual but are attracted to more than just men and women. Those who identify as bisexual, or under the bisexual umbrella (also known as 'bisexual+'), may also be attracted to individuals who are non-binary, genderfluid, or those who are transgender. If you have any questions about whether or not you meet this criterion, you are welcome to contact me at any time.

Church of England: Participants for this project should affiliate themselves with the Church of England. This means that if someone asked you what religion you are, you would say that you are an Anglican or go to a Church of England church. You do not need to be devout to take part in this project, and I am not expecting you to go to church every week. You may only go to church a couple of times a year or may attend an Anglican youth group but do not go to church. If you have any questions about whether or not you meet this criterion, you are welcome to contact me at any time.

What is the study about?

For this project, I am interested to find out about your religious and sexual identities as a bisexual+ Church of England Christian. I would like to know what it means to you to be

bisexual+, and a Christian, and if you keep these identities separate or bring them together. I am also interested to find out if you feel supported by the Church, and if you are aware of any Church 'views' on bisexuality. If you know nothing, that is fine – I am not expecting you to do any prior reading before the interview.

Taking part will involve both a focus group and an interview. Both the focus group and the interview are voluntary – I will discuss this more in the next section. The interview will be 'semi-structured', which means we may end up talking about things that I have not explicitly asked. This is fine – I will encourage you throughout the interview to talk about things that you think are relevant, even if I have not asked, as long as this is comfortable for you.

What will taking part entail?

As stated above, you have the opportunity to take part in a focus group. Focus groups are a great way for participants to become more involved in the project that they are being interviewed for, and to give their views on the topic, and what they would like to be questioned about.

The focus group would include yourself, me (the researcher), and the other participants who are being interviewed. During the focus group I will explain the project to you and what I am looking to research and will then allocate plenty of time for you as participants to talk to me about your experiences and what you would like to be asked. If you feel like you don't want to take part in the focus group, but would still like to be interviewed, then that is fine.

During the focus group I will ask you to have your cameras on, so that I am aware of who I am talking to. In normal times focus groups would normally take place in person and we would meet in a public place, such as a university conference room or village hall, so I am trying to replicate this as much as possible. You may be happy to show your face but would not like your real name to be displayed. This is fine – let me know if this is the case, and I will allocate you a pseudonym (fake name) before the online session, which you can then use to 'log in' with. If you have any issues with WiFi or bandwidth and know that having your camera on will disrupt your ability to interact with the call, I will ask for you to have a preliminary phone call with myself, to confirm your identity via your voice. I will remind all participants at the beginning of the focus group that information shared is confidential and will request that you do not share details about each other (if people choose to use their real names) or about what is said.

You will then be taking part in a semi-structured interview, which we will plan a date and time that is convenient for you. There will be some set questions, which I will ask everyone that takes part in the project. These questions may lead me to ask different questions or have a discussion with you that was not planned. This is fine, as I want you to feel that you can talk freely about your thoughts and feelings.

I will also be asking you to take part in a short reading task, where we will read a passage together and then discuss how it made you feel. If you need any additional support, for example having the text in larger font or on a specific-coloured background, or if you would like me to read it to you, please discuss this with me before the interview so that I can accommodate your needs as best as possible.

You can withdraw at any time during the interview if you feel uncomfortable. You should not

feel that you are letting me down, or that you are causing any issues. You may also withdraw consent for your data being used in my research. You can do this up to one month after the data has been collected. If you withdraw from the project, your data will be destroyed immediately. All data will be destroyed after 10 years.

How do I benefit from taking part?

There are no financial benefits for participants taking part in this research. However, your thoughts and comments will be really beneficial in providing an insight into how bisexuals in the Church of England feel, as not a lot of work has been done on this. By taking part in the project, your voice as a bisexual Christian is being heard by the research community and will potentially pave the way for more projects to be undertaken on the bisexual Christian community.

Are there any risks in taking part?

There are no risks in taking part. If you have any concerns or feel that your mental health has been impacted in any way then you should contact someone who you feel safe to talk to, such as a close friend or family member, or a trusted member of staff at your school, college or university. Similarly, you can access one of the following services:

<https://www.mind.org.uk/>

<https://youngminds.org.uk/>

<https://www.childline.org.uk/>

A set of statements will be shared with participants who take part in this interview along with this participant information sheet. This set of statements explains what the processes are for any participants who contravene (go against) the Equality Act (2010) during the study.

What if I change my mind?

You can withdraw your consent up to one month after the data is collected. After that, data analysis will begin, and you will no longer be able to withdraw your consent as a participant. You may withdraw your consent and leave the interview at any time during the interview.

How will my data be stored?

All data will be stored electronically on a password-protected device during the transcribing stage and will only be accessed by authorised personnel involved in the project. After this it will be uploaded to the University of Birmingham's secure system called BEAR. All data will be stored on BEAR for 10 years, and following this it will be destroyed.

All data will be anonymised. This means that I will not use your real name at any point, even when it is only myself accessing the data. A name will be generated on a name generator and will be allocated to your data. This pseudonym will be used throughout the thesis so that you are not identifiable.

What if I have any queries?

Any queries which have not been answered by this information sheet should be directed to Harriet McNerney, the research investigator, in the first instance on the email address provided below.

Research investigator: Harriet McNerney, PhD FT Theology and Religion

Investigator contact details: 

The information which you supply for this research will be entered into a filing system or database. The information will be retained by the University of Birmingham and will only be used for the purpose of research, and statistical and audit purposes. By supplying this information, you are consenting to the University storing your information for the purposes stated above. The information will be processed by the University of Birmingham in accordance with the provisions of the Data Protection Act 2018.



Participant information sheet

Statement to read aloud:

I would like you to read the participant information sheet below, the statements of response sheet and the consent form. Following this, I would request that you complete the consent form. You are entitled to take part or choose not to take part in the study. Please review all the information and if you have any additional questions, please ask the researcher ahead of the study.

Research project title:

An examination of the sexual and religious lives of bisexual+ Church of England 18 - 25-year-olds through critical document analysis of Church of England policies and reflective participant interviews.

Organisation:

Researcher: Miss Harriet McInerney

Supervisor(s): Dr Karen Wenell, Dr Sarah Hall

This research will be conducted as part of my PhD in Theology and Religion at the University of Birmingham.

Who can take part?

You have been invited to take part in this study due to your involvement in the *Living in Love and Faith* report. Participants must agree to the statements in the consent form and provide their consent to take part by signing the consent form.

What is the study about?

The study aims to learn more about the sexual and religious lives of 18-25-year-old bisexuals who worship in the Church of England. Part of this research involves finding out if these individuals feel supported by the Church, and if they are aware of what has been written about bisexuals in Church publications. To examine responses to this, participants will be given a passage from *Issues in Human Sexuality* to read.

What will taking part entail?

You will be asked to complete a consent form. You will not be required to take part. If you choose to take part, or choose not to, it will not negatively affect you in any way. As a participant you will be asked to take part in a semi-structured interview with the researcher. You will be provided with the question prompts beforehand. The interview will be recorded and transcribed. The transcript will be stored on the University of Birmingham's secure site called BEAR.

Participants can withdraw at any time during the interview. This means that they can remove themselves from the interview at any time during it and withdraw consent for their data to be used in the research. Participants can withdraw consent for their data to be used in the research up to one month after the data is collected. All data will be destroyed after 10 years.

How do I benefit from taking part?

There are no financial benefits for participants taking part in this research. However, your thoughts and comments will provide a better theological view of bisexuality and the Church of England, which in turn will provide strong context for the second round of interviews.

Are there any risks in taking part?

There are no risks in taking part. If participants have any concerns or feel that their mental health has been impacted in any way, then the following mental health services are available:

<https://www.mind.org.uk/>

<https://www.kooth.com/>

<https://www.time-to-change.org.uk/mental-health-and-stigma/help-and-support>

They may also contact the *Education Support* website on:

<https://www.educationsupport.org.uk/>

A set of statements will be shared with participants who take part in this interview along with this participant information sheet. This set of statements explains what the processes are for any participants who contravene the Equality Act (2010) during the study.

What if I change my mind?

You can withdraw your consent up to one month after the data is collected. After that, data analysis will begin, and you will no longer be able to withdraw your consent as a participant. You may withdraw your consent and leave the interview at any time during the interview.

How will my data be stored?

All data will be stored electronically on a password-protected device during the transcribing stage and will only be accessed by authorised personnel involved in the project. After this it will be uploaded to the University of Birmingham's secure system called BEAR. All data will be stored on BEAR for 10 years, following this it will be destroyed.

As a well-known individual, you will be given the choice to use your name in this project or to be anonymous. If you choose the latter, your data will be anonymised a month after it is collected. You will then either be pseudonymised, or allocated a code to replace your name.

Can I access the results of the study?

You will have the opportunity to request to see the results of the research once the project is complete.

What if I have any queries?

Any queries which have not been answered by this information sheet should be directed to

Harriet McNerney, the research investigator, in the first instance on the email address provided below.

Research investigator: Harriet McNerney, PhD FT Theology and Religion

Investigator contact details:

The information which you supply for this research will be entered into a filing system or database. The information will be retained by the University of Birmingham and will only be used for the purpose of research, and statistical and audit purposes. By supplying this information, you are consenting to the University storing your information for the purposes stated above. The information will be processed by the University of Birmingham in accordance with the provisions of the Data Protection Act 2018.



UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM

Participant consent form

Participant code:

Research project title:

An examination of the sexual and religious lives of bisexual+ Church of England 18 - 25-year-olds through critical document analysis of Church of England policies and reflective participant interviews.

Rationale for research:

The aim of this research is to explore the sexual and religious lives of 18 to 25-year-old bisexual+ Church of England worshippers. The research aims to explore your thoughts and feelings about your sexuality and your faith, and whether you feel supported by the Church.

Participant information:

You will be asked to complete this consent form, after reading all the accompanying documents and asking any queries that you may have.

You will be asked to take part in a focus group, which will allow you and other participants to discuss with me, the researcher, the kind of questions that you would like to be asked. This focus group will give you the opportunity to discuss what you believe to be important issues in regard to your faith and your sexuality and will help to shape this project. You do not have to take part in the focus group if you do not wish to.

You will then be asked to take part in a semi-structured interview, which will include a reading task with an unseen passage. The interview will last no more than 90 minutes.

In line with the University of Birmingham's ethical guidance:

- Participation in the focus group is voluntary; you may choose to only take part in the interview if you wish.
- Participation in the semi-structured interview is voluntary, and consent can be withdrawn at any time up to one month after the interview. Upon withdrawal of consent, all information relating to you would be destroyed.
- Participants have a right to withdraw from the interview or refuse to answer any question.
- All participants will be anonymised in the study, to maintain confidentiality.
- The interview will be audio-recorded, with the interview transcribed (typed out). Only the researcher and supervisors (if necessary) will hear the audio recording. and all data collected in the study will be stored securely in line with the University of Birmingham ethics policy.

- All data collected will be destroyed ten years after the study has been completed.
- All data collected will be used for the purposes of this research only. It will be accessible only by myself.

Participant Consent:

Please complete the section below by ticking the boxes on the left hand side of the page.

☐ I confirm that I have read and understand the participant information leaflet for this study. I have had the opportunity to ask questions if necessary and have had these answered satisfactorily.

☐ I consent to taking part in the focus group. I understand that I must have my camera on during the focus group but may request a pseudonym if this is what I would prefer.

OR

☐ I would not like to take part in the focus group, but would still like to be interviewed.

☐ I understand that if I am unable to use my camera for any reason, but would like to take part in the focus group, I must take part in a preliminary phone call with the researcher to confirm my identity.

☐ I consent to participating in the interview as stated above.

☐ I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, quoting my participant code (at top of consent form) for up to one month following the interview without giving a reason. If I withdraw my data will be removed from the study and will be destroyed.

☐ I understand that the interview will be audio-recorded and transcribed (typed-out).

Only the researcher and supervisors (if necessary) will hear the audio-recording and all data collected in the study will be stored securely in line with the University of Birmingham ethics policy. All data collected will be destroyed ten years after the study has been completed.

☐ I understand that the interview will be transcribed and analysed in the above study.

☐ I understand that all safeguarding guidelines will be followed, with the researcher raising any concerns.

Name of participant:

Date:

Signature:

Name of researcher/individual obtaining consent:

Date:

Signature:

Research investigator and contact details:

Harriet McNerney, PhD FT Theology and Religion

Email:

Supervisors:

Dr Karen Wenell, Dr Sarah Hall

This information is being collected as part of a research project undertaken in the Department of Theology and Religion the University of Birmingham. The information which you supply and that which may be collected as part of the research project will be entered into a filing system or database and will only be accessed by authorised personnel involved in the project, as mentioned above. The information will be retained by the University of Birmingham and will only be used for the purpose of research, and statistical and audit purposes. By supplying this information, you are consenting to the University storing your information for the purposes stated above. The information will be processed by the University of Birmingham in accordance with the provisions of the Data Protection Act 2018. No identifiable personal data will be published; in both data storage and published work you will be pseudonymised.



UNIVERSITY OF
BIRMINGHAM

Participant consent form

Participant code:

Research project title:

An examination of the sexual and religious lives of bisexual+ Church of England 18 - 25-year-olds through critical document analysis of Church of England policies and reflective participant interviews.

Research investigator and contact details:

Harriet McInerney, PhD FT Theology and Religion

Email:

Supervisors:

Dr Karen Wenell, Dr Sarah Hall

Rationale for research

The aim of this research is to explore the sexual and religious lives of 18 to 25-year-old bisexual+ Church of England worshippers.

The first portion of my fieldwork aims to explore your thoughts on the *Living in Love and Faith* project, and your wider thoughts on views surrounding bisexuality in the Church of England. Your answers will provide support for the second set of interviews, which will be conducted with those referenced in the research title.

Participant information:

You will be asked to complete this consent form, after reading all the accompanying documents and asking any queries that you may have.

You will be asked to take part in a semi-structured interview. The interview will last no more than 90 minutes.

In line with the University of Birmingham's ethical guidance:

- Participation in the semi-structured is voluntary, and consent can be withdrawn at any time up to one month after the interview.
- Participants have a right to withdraw from the interview or refuse to answer any question.
- Participants can be anonymous in the research write-up if they wish.
- The interview will be audio-recorded, with the interview transcribed (typed out). Only the researcher and supervisors (if necessary) will hear the audio-recording and all data

collected in the study will be stored securely in line with the University of Birmingham ethics policy.

- All data collected will be destroyed ten years after the study has been completed.
- All data collected will be used for the purposes of this research only. It will be accessible only by myself.

Participant Consent:

Please complete this section by checking the boxes on the left-hand side of the page.

☐ I confirm that I have read and understand the participant information leaflet for this study. I have had the opportunity to ask questions if necessary and have had these answered satisfactorily.

☐ I consent to participating in the interview as stated above.

☐ I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, quoting my participant code (at top of consent form) for up to one month following the interview without giving a reason. If I withdraw my data will be removed from the study and will be destroyed.

☐ I understand that the interview will be audio-recorded and transcribed (typed-out). Only the researcher and supervisors (if necessary) will hear the audio recording, and all data collected in the study will be stored securely in line with the University of Birmingham ethics policy. All data collected will be destroyed ten years after the study has been completed.

☐ I understand that the interview will be transcribed and analysed in the above study.

☐ I understand that all safeguarding guidelines will be followed, with the researcher raising any concerns.

Name of participant:

Date:

Signature:

Name of researcher/individual obtaining consent:

Date:

Signature:

This information is being collected as part of a research project undertaken in the Department of Theology and Religion the University of Birmingham. The information which you supply and which may be collected as part of the research project will be entered into a filing system or database and will only be accessed by authorised personnel involved in the project, as mentioned above. The information will be retained by the University of Birmingham and will only be used for the purpose of research, and statistical and audit purposes. By supplying this

information, you are consenting to the University storing your information for the purposes stated above. The information will be processed by the University of Birmingham in accordance with the provisions of the Data Protection Act 2018. No identifiable personal data will be published; in both data storage and published work you will be pseudonymised.



Research project title: An examination of the sexual and religious lives of bisexual+ Church of England 18 - 25-year-olds through critical document analysis of Church of England policies and reflective participant interviews.

Research investigator: Harriet McInerney, PhD FT Theology and Religion

Investigator contact details: [REDACTED]

Supervisors: Dr Karen Wenell, Dr Sarah Hall

Semi-structured interview questions

Phase 1: *Living in Love and Faith*

Please see the questions below, which I plan to ask you during the interview. The interview will take a semi-structured format, and I may ask you different questions depending on the comments you make. If you have any queries about the questions below, please contact the research investigator in the first instance.

1. **Why were you chosen to be involved in the *Living in Love and Faith* project?**
2. **What are your thoughts on previous Church of England documents such as *Issues in Human Sexuality* or *The Working Group on Human Sexuality*?**
3. **You may be aware that *Issues in Human Sexuality* describes bisexuals as 'promiscuous' and states that if they choose to be in a same-sex relationship, they must remain celibate (this information can be found in Section 5.8 of the text). What are your thoughts on this?**
4. **Do you think that the language in documents such as *Issues* or *Living in Love and Faith* accurately reflect the lived experience of bisexuals in the Church of England?**
5. **Do you believe that there are support networks in place for those who identify as bisexual within the Church of England?**



Statements of Response

Research project title: An examination of the sexual and religious lives of bisexual+ Church of England 18 - 25-year-olds through critical document analysis of Church of England policies and reflective participant interviews.

Research investigator: Harriet McInerney, PhD FT Theology and Religion
Investigator contact details: [REDACTED]

List of responses:

Your right to freedom of speech is upheld as part of Article 10 of the Human Rights Act (1998). In your responses, you are invited to use this right to share your thoughts, attitudes, and perspectives.

If your responses contravene the Equality Act (2010), the researcher is obliged to report these responses to the relevant bodies. These might consist of, but are not limited to, the Designated Safeguarding Lead and the Senior Leadership Team within the ITE research institution. To contravene the Equality Act (2010) means that participants responses violate one or more of the nine protected characteristics: Age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation (Equality Act, 2010: 1).

If you feel affected in any way by the research, please access the University's mental health and wellbeing services which can be found on the University home page. Alternatively, you can access counselling services at Education Support: <https://www.educationsupport.org.uk/>

You can also access support through organisations such as Mind, Young Minds or Childline, via the following links:

<https://www.mind.org.uk/>

<https://youngminds.org.uk/>

<https://www.childline.org.uk/>

If you have further questions about these statements, please clarify these with the researcher.

References:

Education Support (2020). Helping You. [Online]. [Accessed 15 March 2021]. Available from: <https://www.educationsupport.org.uk/>

Equality Act (2010). *Equality Act 2010*. [Online]. [Accessed 15 March 2021]. Available from: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents>

Human Rights Act (1998). *Article 10 of the Human Rights Act 1998*. [Online]. [Accessed 15 March 2021]. Available from:

<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1998/42/schedule/1/part/II/chapter/9>

Appendix C

Tweets and blog posts, as referenced in the literature review

Permission has been sought from the individuals quoted below, where possible, to use their data within this thesis. Appropriate references can be found in the thesis bibliography.



The Revd Dr Helen Dawes

@revhelend



I've been ordained so long I wasn't asked to assent to Issues in Human Sexuality, but the snippet on bisexuality that's circulating here is clearly so wrong and callous that we need an urgent conversation about how discernment processes do this better.

8:48 AM · Oct 30, 2021



Jeremy Pemberton

@JCBPemberton

Of course it is. And it should be burnt.

2:19 PM · Jan 18, 2023 · **82** Views



Religion Media Centre ✓

@RelMedCentre



"Issues in Human Sexuality ... is absurd and immoral" — @charliebelllive

12:15 PM · Jan 18, 2023 · **2,368** Views

The depressing thing about this – no, there are many depressing things about this, but one of the first that springs to mind is that it relies on a definition of bisexuality that no bisexuals use, a myth that is in wide circulation beyond the Church, namely, that ‘bisexual activity... inevitably involves being unfaithful.’ The majority of my secular straight acquaintance agrees that the Church’s attitude to homosexuality is bafflingly uncharitable, but I’ve had to explain a tedious number of times that no, I’m still only sleeping with the person I’m married to.

I have had counselling in the past. It helped, but not in the way that *Issues* seems to think it might. It was the beginning of an attempt to achieve what this calls ‘a degree of inner healing’. What eventually came to the surface was the inevitable conclusion that my attempt to ‘follow the way of holiness in... heterosexual marriage’, ignoring all the bits of my personality that didn’t fit that story, hadn’t worked at all; it had led to me leaving half of myself outside the church door. That stint of counselling, and all the thinking I did after that, didn’t ‘heal’ me of being bisexual, because bisexuality is not something that needs to be healed. ‘Dealing with’ bisexuality by ignoring it is, pastorally speaking, a terrible move.



Claire Jones

@RevClaireJones

...

Here, once again, is the @c_of_e's official view on bisexual people. Please stop using this 25 y/o document. Please.

5.8 The first is that of bisexuality. We recognise that there are those whose sexual orientation is ambiguous, and who can find themselves attracted to partners of either sex. Nevertheless it is clear that bisexual activity must always be wrong for this reason, if for no other, that it inevitably involves being unfaithful. The Church’s guidance to bisexual Christians is that if they are capable of heterophile relationships and of satisfaction within them, they should follow the way of holiness in either celibacy or abstinence or heterosexual marriage. In the situation of the bisexual it can also be that counselling will help the person concerned to discover the truth of their personality and to achieve a degree of inner healing.

9:33 PM · Jun 14, 2016

Appendix D
Excerpts from research diary

discussions of language. Felt a lot of what could probably be described as disgust, but definitely exasperation. I'm not surprised though, whilst my sexuality has basically meant nothing to me in my Christian contexts, it obviously means something to Katie, and why on earth would you feel happy or comfortable or included knowing your church stereotypes you in this way? Her comment took me by surprise, but in a good way. We laughed together and I thought 'fair play' at her use of language, but I also felt a sadness behind it. How rubbish, how awful to feel as if your church is insulting you in this way. Why would anyone want that?

Research diary entry, 16th February 2022

that was mentioned throughout was mia's line of work. I've met plenty of people who work in a church setting or a Christian context, but not this kind of job. So I guess I'm not surprised that mia had a lot to say about marriage. I think her argument is so important and gives you a lot to consider - why can a priest bless so many things, and yet just be totally unable to bless two very loving and very committed same-sex people? I could hear her emotions in her voice, this is obviously quite a sore spot for mia. I wonder what people from outside of the church would think of what she's said, looking in? Maybe they wouldn't be surprised, but honestly, I think some would just be totally baffled.

Consider her perspective, I think it's really quite unique, maybe not necessarily to the whole community because you don't want to stereotype, but this concept that Eve refers to of an 'on and off switch' is fascinating. I haven't really come across this massively - except for maybe Ruth? - I kind of want to put this down to the CofE environment that Eve is worshipping within.

more trad/ → less ability to be
Chapel life open up identity

Less ability to affirm? ←

When considering Eve's perspective, I wonder if she's ever really thought about

worshipping in a different space, one where maybe she doesn't feel like she has to flip this switch between her two identities. But then I suppose what should really be asked here is why should she? And maybe, why does such an environment exist in which Eve feels like this is what she has to do?

Appendix E

Bisexual participant interview transcripts

Transcripts have been removed at the request of the viva examiners. A copy of the transcripts can be obtained via the researcher.

Appendix F

Bisexual participant thematic tables

The following pages reflect the data tables created from my own personal thematic analysis. As will be seen, some themes were created that were not then used as wider themes, or the quotations within them may have then fit into the wider three themes discussed within this thesis.

Theme	Sub-theme	Quotation/idea
Space	Creating bi-visibility in Church of England spaces	BC001: 'I think there's absolutely a place for that, [...] a place for celebrating sexuality in all of its forms, and especially within church environments where it hasn't been such a safe space, and I think I would agree with the idea that there needs to be a little overcompensation on the Church's part to re-welcome that community into its congregation' BC008: 'You definitely get that invisibility and you definitely get access to spaces that I think gay or lesbian or trans people wouldn't get access to, just through being able to talk about an ex and using he/him pronouns for that and then people are just like oh, because, even if they thought you were gay before, they now realise you're 'straight' because they don't know that bi exists, and so, it's kind of, thinking for a while that you're straight because she's talking about Dan who she dated three years ago, [so] she straight, and then you get welcomed into these places where you're not really welcome' BC010: 'Within faith spaces... I've internalised a lot of less of the homophobia I've heard because I'm like, "this doesn't apply to me"' BC010: 'But with the Church... it just doesn't factor into the discourse, and then that does make it easier to deal with the discourse because it's not attacking you' BC010: 'I think like, the institutional church, the Church of England, just doesn't know bisexual people exist, in the same way I think it doesn't know non binary people exist, that everything is just like very binary in thought, which obviously is like a reflection of society more widely, than the Church as well' Also links to support and affirmation - BC010: 'It's just invisible which again, is sort of between oh you're not talking about me, which means I'm not being supported, but equally it means that, like you're not creating the conditions which means I need to be supported more because you've created biphobia in the Church' BC010: 'We are happy and we are here and we are comfortable in your spaces [...] We are in your churches and we are around'
	Queer in Christian/ Christian in queer	BC008: 'In dedicated queer spaces, sometimes it's really unhelpful to bring up your faith, especially when people who shared your faith have caused so much harm in that community, and I try to be as open and as myself as I can, but sometimes, you know, people are going and sharing, sharing stories of horrible things that they've experienced, and I've experienced similar things, and if I share that people just assume that I'm no

		longer a Christian and that's not quite true, and so, sometimes I do end up avoiding talking about it or not being completely open about being Christian' BC010: 'And then equally like, I've has as many uncomfortable experiences in queer spaces of trying to talk about faith'
	Wariness in certain spaces	BC006: 'I'm very wary of joining certain movements, because even if they might say they're inclusive, I don't know that and I'm the same with church. Like, I'll go there. But I'm very 'one foot in one foot out', I am very wary with who I am and how involved I get because you don't know who you're going to kind of meet, if that makes sense' BC006: 'In terms of when I look at my sexuality, I don't tend to bring it up' BC006: 'I once brought it up in an Alpha class with two people, and the answer they gave me was quite, how do I describe it? It was... they didn't say anything bad, but it's kind of like, neutral, if that makes sense, it's like "oh we struggle to reconcile with things in the Bible and how we feel today about things like that". So, you know, a very diplomatic answer' BC007: 'I think also, I kind of feel like when I'm in the LGBT community I feel like it's almost my duty to kind of, put my hand up and say like I'm a Christian, and I'm sorry' BC007: 'I feel like I have to sort of explain like, why I'm Christian to people within the LGBT community, whereas it's just not a conversation that happens on the flip side, in the Christian community' BC008: 'Again in church spaces, sometimes you know, in my church I'm out, but if I'm visiting another church sometimes I think, you know, it might not be great to bring this up, it would not be great to be myself in this situation' BC008: 'Some Christians, even if they're completely open and accepting, they just won't really get what you're saying with issues you're having, and they'll see some things as like, attacks on the Church, whether or not, it was not meant to be an attack on the Church, it's just my experience... and so I do feel like I can only really like, fully be myself among people who have also gone through the process of being queer and Christian'
	'LGBT' vs. bi-specific spaces	Can also link to: understandings and misunderstandings of bisexuality, and how can we work towards a more bi-inclusive future within the Church? - BC002: 'I'm not so sure, I feel like there's good pastoral support in my church [...] but I'm not sure they would be fully equipped to answer questions I might have about bisexuality in particular. It's fairly inclusive so I feel supported as a queer person, but I'm not too sure about the particular bi part'

		Also link to Queer in Christian/Christian in queer and visibility - BC010: ‘But maybe this is a this is a benefit of being, benefit is the wrong word, but a privilege of being bi as opposed to being gay in the Church, because there is nowhere near the same levels of discourse around bisexuality as there are around homosexuality, and that’s obviously a form of bierasure in and of itself, but sometimes invisibility can have its benefits in that you’re not, or in my experience at least as a bi person, constantly facing the kind of discourse that gets aimed at gay people, and even if their discourse is also aimed at you, it’s like a different language and doesn’t feel as personal, obviously then that’s also tied up with the fact that like, bisexuals don’t exist et cetera, which is horrible, and then difficult to deal with in and of itself, but I feel like yeah, there’s always an opportunity to challenge’
	Support and affirmation within Christian spaces	BC001: ‘I think the majority of the support I personally received as a queer Christian has been from external sources’ BC001: ‘Have I actively seen a church in my lifetime host a group for queer people? No. Have I seen anyone step up and say “yes, I’m happy to mentor or chat to anyone in this space?” No.’ BC001: ‘I don’t think anyone normally would access that kind of level of support and discussion. Nor do I think they would feel it was appropriate to offer to their congregation’. BC007: ‘I’m much more open about my sexuality in the wider church than I am within my actual church, like it’s kind of easier to kind of, talk about it and seek affirmation with Christians that you don’t sort of see on a weekly basis, but it would be nice to have both’ BC001: ‘In terms of whether I feel affirmed in those spaces and whether I sought out affirmation in those spaces, I think affirmation has certainly come from individual Christians, people who I’ve known on a personal level for a long time. But I would not say the Church as a whole has been affirming, if that makes sense’ BC004: ‘I think there’s support from particular individuals who are Christians, but I don’t think there is... I don’t think there’s any support really, in the model of the Church of England’ BC004: ‘I feel like at this point [when they were aged 15/16], I was affirmed by God, and then the push back that I received from future churches has kind of made me feel like I don’t need to, I don’t want to search for affirmation within a church, I have affirmation for myself. I’m not seeking for anyone else’s approval at this point’

	BC004: ‘When I was younger I was looking for the Church and the people in the Church to accept it and give me support, and then as I’ve grown older, I’ve kind of thought well I’m just not going to get that, so I’m not going to look for it’ BC005: ‘I think specifically to do with bisexuality, no... Like I, you know, the Church of England as an institution I view quite differently, as sort of like, a different entity to my home church [...] my home church has supported me in so many ways, and I know that they all love me very much and like, my bisexuality wouldn’t be an issue’ BC005: ‘It’s infuriating sometimes because I would love for the Church of England, as an institution, because they have so much power as well, like if they came out and they were like, we sort of, affirm same gender marriages, we affirm bisexual people, it would be such a powerful thing, and they have the, they have the capacity to do that, and they like actively choose not to, and so I take kind of quite a lot, I take that personally you know’ BC005: ‘It’s just a complete lack of progress and... yeah implies that, it implies sort of a lack of care for those members of their Church, is how I take it really’ BC008: ‘There’s support in the Church, but there’s not support from the Church, so it’s not... there’s never that support at an institutional level, because at an institutional level, I’m still, you know, I’m still ‘wrong’’ BC008: ‘At an individual level there’s so many people I’ve met in the Church, who are just absolutely amazing, who have provided so much support over the years, and that’s comes from straight people and queer people’ BC008: ‘I’ve never hugely felt like I’ve needed support from people in the Church’ BC008: ‘I feel like I would, if I wanted to get affirmation off people, I feel like that would tie in with getting permission and I didn’t know about that’ [...] ‘talking to people in authority and like, asking them whether they would support me, or asking whether they would approve of something that I do, it just feels like... So okay, so what do I say if they say no? Do I then either stop talking to them? Well, I don’t want to do that, because they’re a nice person who I like, or do I just disagree with them about this major moral thing in my life? No, not that either...’ BC008: ‘I know that there is a, now know that there is a network of allies working in the Church and I mean, even with the Living in Love and Faith process, seeing people who I didn’t know were allies tweeting about it

	or sharing things on social media or preaching about it, and I've seen that and I've realised that there were more, probably more allies than I thought that were in the Church... BC003: 'I feel like it, at the moment it's only really peer support, I think, I don't feel like there are very many places that I can go to where I could say, speak to a faith leader about this, I could speak to other people that identify in this way, but not kind of, engage in a broader dialogue' BC003: 'I think they had something called Open Table, which I never actually went to, but I was kind of, I knew about, but that was the only thing that I can think of, apart from purely like peer-to-peer support, that's not kind of organised, but yeah in terms of ordained ministers, no' BC003: 'I think the allies are other people, so they're not really allies, they're other people that have that identity, or someone very close to them has that identity, so allies in terms of people that feel the same way, but not allies in terms of non-queer people that are supportive' BC010: 'Um, I mean I am bothered, because I want to feel like, welcome in a space, but I'm probably not seeking anything other than sort of, implicit affirmation' BC010: 'I don't want to feel unwelcome' BC010: 'Affirmation isn't necessary but there's a line between feeling unwelcome just like, not being, like, you don't want to feel unwelcome but anything apart from that is all one could want, right?'

Theme	Sub-theme	Quotation/idea
Marriage	Guilt	BC007: ‘ I do feel a lot of guilt with that, and especially being bisexual, especially like, cis-presenting, I don’t necessarily ‘look’ gay, you wouldn’t sort of know, I don’t know, if you saw me, so I sort of do feel like I have a lot or privilege when it comes to being in the Church compared to some other people in the community, especially when it comes to if I married a man’ BC001: ‘I think, especially when we started thinking about where we wanted to get married and if we wanted to get married in the Church of England, this was very much the question we were asking, like, “is it fair?” that I get to marry you in this space when, had you been a woman, it just wouldn't have been allowed and I felt so guilty about it, and I was just turning it over and over and over, and I sat down with one of my colleagues who’s a gay man and has been with his, married to his husband for many years and I just said, “look, I feel so guilty about getting married in the church, what do you think I should do?” and he turned to me and said “don't feel guilty, the Church will do that for you, get married in the church woman, it's your right” BC001: ‘It is aggravated perhaps by the fact that I have a close friend, and also colleague, who's engaged and has been engaged to, she has been engaged to a woman for the last few years, and they've been waiting for the opportunity to get married in church and she has made several snide comments about my ability to pass as a straight person and everything else, and that sort of anxiety that I'm having what she would want, there's definitely, there's definitely that sort of like, that sort of guilt that, like, is this the right thing to do?’ BC003: ‘I feel like okay, if I’m a member of this church then I should really abide by this’ BC004: ‘There very easily could have been a version of me who’s fallen in love with someone else who was a woman, and I am now living this life which is a bit of like, I say I’ve taken the easy path, I’m allowed to get married in my home church and I don’t have to come out to anyone I don’t want to [...] I can just be a very straight-passing Christian’ BC004: ‘It’s another thing isn’t it, like that myself who has, you know, potentially grown a little bit away from faith over the last few years because of this pushback that I’ve had from the Church and him [their partner], who has never been Christian, we are allowed to get married in church, but two devout, hardcore, diehard Christian lesbians can’t’
	Identity crisis	BC004: ‘I did have a bit of a wobbly about getting married in my home church, because I felt like I was betraying a part of me’

		BC006: 'In terms of like, with gay or bisexual people, I find it really unfair because I go to church, you know, I take my faith very seriously and all that, and I've even volunteered, this is a big step for me, I even volunteered to do Sunday school with them now even though I'm worried about if people find out that I'm bisexual, and yet if my boyfriend was a woman, I would not even be able to get married or have a blessing in a church that I have followed for you know, quite some time now and that I care very, very, very much about' BC006: 'I mean, it's hard because, it's hard because if he's a guy and I got married, you know, I can do that, but I know of many people in same-sex relationships who can't. But I think, I want to always try campaign for same sex marriage to be allowed. That is something that I want to do now, I've decided, kind of in the future' BC006: 'If I did get married in a church, I still want to make that commitment, and if I'm able to, if I'm lucky to do that, I want to be able to honour it and I would always keep trying to campaign so that other people can have what I would be able to do' BC005: 'I love weddings so much, I think they're such a beautiful thing, not just for the sort of like tradition of it, like I think of it as a way of involving God in your relationship as well, and it's not just for me like a fun little party, it genuinely is like an important religious thing for me as well, and it makes me really, really sad that I might not be able to get married in the Church of England' BC005: 'Yeah, so really complex thing for me, marriage, and it shouldn't be like... it just really shouldn't be, I just wish it was as simple as like, I am a member of the Church of England, I love my home church, I want to sort of affirm my relationship with God and with my partner in a place that means loads to me because I love them very much like, why is it not that simple, you know?' BC007: 'it's tough, I mean because I've always said, because I've grown up in in the wider church, always wanted to get married in church and marriage is a very religious thing for me, and I don't ever, I couldn't really imagine not getting married in church. But then if that was taken away from me if I was marrying a woman, I guess I wouldn't have much choice. It's a little bit complicated' BC008: 'Um well, I feel like there is only one way in which I could marry in the Church, in the 'correct way' in the Church's view, and it is completely up to chance' BC008: 'I would never want to get married in the Church of England, to be honest, unless I could marry as myself in the Church of England, and so even, because I feel like if I married a man, I would still, I would be

		lying if I took marriage oaths in the Church of England, I'd be lying if I went through with a C of E marriage because I feel like I would be committing myself as straight' BC008: 'I feel like unless they would marry me for me, like, as me, it would be a bit disingenuous to get married in the Church of England, and I think until I could marry a woman with as much ease as I could marry a man, I wouldn't want to get married in the Church' BC008: 'It does make me sad, because I would like to get married in a Church of England church, but I'm not willing to do that unless I could fully get married in the Church of England' BC003: 'I don't feel like I could necessarily, for me, a marriage wouldn't be valid unless it was in church' BC003: I couldn't get married, I don't think, in a registry office, I think it would be the case that if I did end up with a woman, I wouldn't, I might marry them, but for me it wouldn't be a marriage, unless it was kind of, happened in a church with, you know, the invocation of God and that kind of thing' BC003: 'If I can't have a marriage in faith, then, I don't really want a marriage. I don't know whether I would actively seek a relationship, a heterosexual relationship, in order to get married' BC003 (also guilt): 'It makes me feel like a bad bisexual, and not a great beacon of the community, but I'm definitely affected by what people think [...] I feel like I'm constrained by societal norms'
	Attitudes towards the Church of England	BC007: 'I think perhaps the Church pushes you sort of towards the early heterosexual marriage, you know, saying get ready for kids now, the normal life, church family' <i>What do you think of the Church of England's attitude towards marriage?</i> - BC006: 'On the whole, very bad and very backward. I think that's surprised a lot of people when they say it's between a man and a woman. Why just, you know, when you read the Bible, and you think is there actually anything really that says we should be doing this? And there isn't' BC006: 'The problem with the man and a woman thing is, there is the idea of procreation. I know people like, coming out of that idea now that everyone should have children, because it can be really difficult for those people who aren't able to have children. Kind of like, invalidating their marriage in a sense' BC006: 'I used to think the Church of England were just trying to reconcile themselves with what the Bible says and how they feel in a modern society, but now I'm realising actually, as long as the Church continues to not allow gay marriage, it will always be institutionally homophobic no matter what's happening, no matter

		how much people try to change it, and that's the way it's going to be unless the view changes really. They need to stop being kind of prejudiced, because to me that's against the word of God as well. You're meant to accept everyone no matter what. So even if it was simple, why would you not fix it? I don't understand it' BC008: 'Okay, with the Church's attitude to marriage I don't fully understand when it started, because the sort of marriage that they're pushing in processes like Living in Love and Faith is a type of marriage that's only been around really since 1950, so are they saying that historical marriages were invalid?' BC008: 'If they do want to preserve a 'historical marriage' then they're reducing women to property, because that is how marriage has been since Jesus's time really, and it's only in the last few years that it's changed' BC010: 'Can we stop being so protective over this, sort of, societal and cultural institution that is, well, a mixture of tying families together through unions, etc'

Theme	Sub-theme	Quotation/idea
Language, policy, and documents	<i>Living in Love and Faith</i>	BC001: ‘It is just so hand hold-y, it doesn’t say anything, it is just like the idiot’s guide to sexuality without actually saying anything about sexuality’ BC001: ‘They’re trying to appease too many different people with one thing, but actually they just ended up doing none of that’ BC001: ‘It is going to do nothing to quell the homophobic voices of the church and it’s going to do nothing to satisfy the queer community of the church that is vastly underrepresented and represented’ BC005: ‘I think it was within our focus group that someone was saying it [LLF] is actually more orientated for people who aren’t that knowledgeable about these things, so you know, maybe it’s not fair for me to be like “oh, it’s not that useful” because maybe for someone who has no idea about these things, it might be quite useful. But I suppose it feels like it, from what I’ve heard, it’s quite a small step for reaching this goal of equality in the Church and that, I mean yeah, at least it’s something, but I don’t think it’s this revolutionary thing’ BC008: ‘I can’t think of a worse book to recommend. It’s confusing, it’s long winded and it’s homophobic’
	<i>Issues in Human Sexuality – General comments</i>	BC008: ‘I think I’m impressed by its ability to get so many of the stereotypes into one short paragraph, like the bit about always being unfaithful...’ BC003: ‘The terming of, you know, ‘the bisexual’, it's like there's some kind of, dehumanised kind of animal, like someone's talking about a species’ BC003: ‘I feel like it's also got very kind of, scientific language like heterophile and heterosexual’ BC001: ‘It is simply laced with a bunch of untrue stereotypes that were generated by scared men who could not understand anything beyond their own heterosexuality, and it is unhelpful and insulting, quite frankly’ BC010: ‘From what I have heard from queer Christians who have engaged in these documents, they are poor and are written by those who do not have the interests of queer people at heart’ BC002: ‘I would not say that celibacy or abstinence or heterosexual marriage are holy if they are not our calling. And I do think, some people are probably called to celibacy or abstinence but not because of their sexual orientation, and probably now we would call that asexuality’ BC002: ‘I hate that people still have to agree with it [<i>Issues</i>] to become ordained, because that really terrifies me

		about the state of the clergy' BC001: 'It is interesting that they're able to say bi-SEX-ual, but hetero-PHILE seems a lot more graceful' BC002: 'This document is the only place I have ever seen or heard the terms heterophile and homophile, and they are just objectively horrible words' BC002: 'By using that language, I think it seems quite dehumanising'
	<i>Issues in Human Sexuality - Ambiguity</i>	BC003: 'Talking about their sexual orientation as ambiguous, I mean it's not ambiguous, it's a definitive sexual identity it's just... yeah, so the idea of ambiguity is kind of troubling and shows a lack of understanding of what the identity actually means' BC004: 'The bit where it says that their sexual orientation is ambiguous. No it's not, it's very clear. I think that plays into the stereotype of bisexual people just experimenting, or still questioning, rather than having like, a full identity in itself' BC006: 'The word 'ambiguous' makes me laugh because it's not ambiguous, it's very clear [...] I actually can't believe this is still used. Actually shocking'
	<i>Issues in Human Sexuality - Unfaithful</i>	BC005: 'It's just insane!... Like okay, firstly, it's that "inevitably involves being unfaithful". That is my first, like... where have they got that from? It's like they've never met a bisexual or ever talked to a bisexual person, like... it just seems to be a complete misunderstanding of what bisexuality is' BC003: 'The assumption that you must be unfaithful, I'm presuming that they mean to your partner, rather than to, do they mean unfaithful to the Church in terms of lacking faith or in terms of cheating on people?' BC004: 'The fact it likens bisexual people to like, non-monogamy, which is again something that I came up against a lot when I came out to people, not Christians but like, everyone. When I first came out I felt like I had to define what I was to everyone and people were saying "oh, you know, who's going to date you if you're just going to go off with someone else?" and that's so harmful and untrue' BC010: 'No, weirdly, weirdly, I just love the that idea of like, bisexuality being intrinsically unfaithful because I'm just like... no, it makes no difference, why, and the fact that's not even anything biblical, it's not coming from, that's literally just a misconception of bisexuality within the general public, and that's not even based on anything scriptural, or whatever'
	<i>Issues in Human</i>	BC005: ' "They should follow the way of holiness" implies that we're not holy if we're with the same gender...'

	<i>Sexuality – Healing and Holiness / TOTP</i>	BC005: ‘The “truth of the personality” it's almost like they are saying that bisexuality is not a truth, it's something that's been sort of like, forced into us or sort of like, nurtured into us kind of thing, by society or the devil or whatever, and we need to sort of, get rid of that and find our true selves, and our true selves will always be heterosexual, you know, it's weird’ BC010: ‘Wow, I just I love the mixture of like perpetuating like, myths about like bisexual promiscuity, combined with like, the bit of spicy conversion therapy talk, oh... Yeah that's, I mean that's just... hilariously bad. You've got to laugh because otherwise it's just depressing’ BC005: ““degree of inner healing” as well, it's so ironic, like it's so ironic, seeing that, basically saying that conversion therapy will achieve a degree of inner healing when it has been shown so many times the harm that conversion therapy causes. It's completely out of touch and completely misinformed really’ BC003: ‘I think this rhetoric of like, discovering the truth of their personality as well just shows the underlying assumption that this isn't the true nature of who they are, that that's some underlying essence of them that is not bisexual or that they're confused and they need to be brought back to where they are’ BC004: ‘It's almost like they're saying that if you choose not to live in the heterosexual way, you're choosing to live half a life’ BC006: ‘The counselling but is very worrying, because that to me is a kind of, veiled description of conversion therapy, which still hasn't properly been illegalised in this country, so that is worrying’

Theme	Sub-theme	Quotation/idea
Forming, understanding, and misunderstanding identity	Forming identity	BC006: 'I know by myself that I don't need to be told that I'm a good or bad Christian or anything like that because of my sexuality, because I know in my head, I know I've had this conversation with God. But you do have to kind of feel accepted by the people there, otherwise, you know, you want to feel like you can go to church and not feel like people are just going to make unkind comments or even worse, exclude you entirely' <i>The participant discussed some painful/traumatic experiences for them here, and explained that they are now going through psychosexual therapy. This discussion emphasises how it is both good and bad experiences that lead us to mould and shape our identities</i> - BC006: 'That's why I have completely like, shut myself off from anyone who's kind of like, part of LGBT groups, as well as church groups, because I just don't know what to do with myself' BC006: 'I grew up with the idea of it's fine if you're gay or bi but don't make a big thing out of it, whatever that was meant to mean, or don't like, as one person put it, shove it in other people's faces and unfortunately, because of that, I kind of have had to separate myself from joining those kind of groups because I'm kind of [...] separating myself from other people, even though that's not the point of these groups' BC005: 'And it was actually just like, meeting those people [in the Christian organisation] that really, really helped me come out as bi, and so I see that as a really pivotal thing in my identity, because there were two things, Christianity and like, my sexuality that I've never really sort of thought to like combine before, and seeing these people living them both out so sort of, passionately and like openly really like, made me think about it and yeah, it was a really lovely thing actually' BC005: 'So like, growing up my church has never said anything about sex or sexuality or gender or whatever, it was just never a thing that people talked about, and so I didn't realise it was a 'thing' that Christians got het up about until I sort of started going to my friend's church' BC001: 'Growing up in the noughties, early teenies wasn't great, so some of our experiences are very much shared [...] but they never had to listen to a sermon about how, you know, 'the gays are the worst thing that's ever happened' [...] they weren't subject to that in the same way that I was' BC001: 'I didn't come out until I was out of that Church of England environment, I didn't come out until I was actually going to this [new, other style of] church in [town name]'

		BC001: 'I think I definitely felt a lot of anxiety about my sexuality in that space, just because it wasn't talked about openly and there was no sort of mentor, whereas there are so many other people in that space who could mentor you on a whole bunch of different things like, you know, what you're going to do after uni[versity] and what jobs you want to have and everything else, but there wasn't anyone you could talk to about your sexuality and so yeah, I think for a long time, sort of, my sexuality was like, coincided with anxiety, just because of the space I was in' BC001: 'For me personally that's been a journey from one - from that first point - to the second point - where it has been, you know, for a very, very long time, it was two separate identities and I am still on this journey, because I personally believe that having, existing as both of those things is the healthiest route possible' BC001: 'My aim is to mesh them together' BC001: 'I don't think it's an impossible task to bring those two identities together but I think, when they're sort of - I'm going to use the word 'anxiety' [again] - about how each sort of 'part' of you interact with each other, I suppose, with those friendship groups'
	Understanding identity	BC010: 'I just don't mask it in any context, including faith ones' BC010: 'I guess I tend not to mask my bisexuality like ever, because [...] I joke that I don't really have any internalised biphobia because it just makes sense to me' BC010: 'With being bi I'm just like, I have no reason to hide this, because usually when I talk about this, I usually tell stories of my first girlfriend and first boyfriend in conjunction' BC001: 'Duality of self' BC008: 'I'm only queer through the lens of being Christian and I'm only Christian through the lens of being queer, I can't really separate them out, my experience of religion is connected to my sexuality and my experience of sexuality has so many links to religion' BC006: 'Personally to me with God, they do come together, but in terms of going to church and kind of how I operate on a wider scale, I do have to keep them separate' BC006: 'I already know that I am [accepted] in God's eyes, so it's kind of a weird dichotomy'

		BC001: 'I have friends who are queer and I have friends who are Christian and, you know, they live two different sets of lives to the one that I lead' BC001: 'Their sort of experience is considerably different to mine' BC001: 'We all grew up in that sort of weird, liminal space where it wasn't quite cool enough, wasn't quite socially acceptable enough to come out and 'be gay'' BC004: 'That's a hard one, because I think I don't want to choose to keep them separate, I feel like I have to keep them separate' BC004: 'Now I'm a little more guarded with it and I don't think I would be, like, out in a new church, unless I felt like it was okay' BC003: 'Sometimes it's a bit of a flipping an on and off switch, so you go in and then you're just a Christian, and then when you leave and you do something else you are bisexual, I don't feel like when I'm in church that I am a bisexual Christian' BC003: 'I'm constantly having to affirm, it kind of jostles between the two, affirming the one or affirming the other, but I think you do still have to affirm both your faith and your sexuality, in both contexts, it just kind of, depends what the circumstances are maybe' BC004: 'I will say I think that when like, coming out to yourself as bisexual is hard because it's just so confusing, and then like, it was really hard to kind of realise "oh, am I?". Like, I was just questioning, and now I'm like well, there's no question, so why would I need anyone else's approval?' BC004: 'Now I'm getting married in that home church, but I'm getting married to a man, so there's no reason for me to be out'
	Misunderstanding identity	BC006: 'It's like, we [the Church] do support LGBT people and all of that, but actually they don't, what with their actions and how they kind of view marriage and all that, and I think they focus too much on the sexual aspect of things, when actually it's about relationships and love and all of that, that's what marriage is meant to be about. It's no one's business who we're sleeping with' BC001: 'For a Christian community that has historically buried its head in the sand when it comes to LGBTQ, their sort of language, even the term 'bisexual' is confusing, and so when I have come out to people in a church environment, there's always... you can always tell if they know what you mean'

		or not, which is the first thing. The second thing is the questions of life, either [a] stunned sort of silence, or, you know, “oh so is that... are you greedy?” or “are you promiscuous?” BC002: ‘I think they must be pretty confused if they think that you’re attracted to someone you’re immediately unfaithful, I mean, I guess that comes from the bit where Jesus says ‘if you look at someone in lust you’ve committed adultery in your heart’, that might be where that comes from’ BC007: ‘It’s interesting like, what you said about abstinence as well, that’s a conversation that’s just shied away from, like the whole idea of sex and preaching abstinence, I think Christianity kinds of feeds into the idea of bisexuals being seen as quite promiscuous and just having sex all the time, which they’re not’ BC006: ‘It can be difficult being a bisexual Christian because if you tell people you’re Christian, naturally the go to for a lot of people is to assume that you’re homophobic, but in the LGBT+ community, I also have to be careful there because some people can also be just as biphobic as the people in the Church as well, so it’s quite a fraught kind of thing to navigate in general’ BC001: ‘You shouldn’t have to justify yourself to belong to a particular space or a particular group, you shouldn’t have to go to pride worried about holding your partner’s hand’ BC006: ‘I do think the attitudes towards bisexual people are very similar to the attitudes towards polyamorous people as well, and the whole idea of deceit and distrust going on and cheating to, when actually there doesn't need to be. As long as people are committed to each other or they consent, and the rules and boundaries are all clear, then, you know, you should leave people alone in that sense’ BC006: ‘I mean people are, forget about religion, people are funny about the idea of bisexuality anyway, because they have this attitude that they [bisexual people] might cheat and stuff’

Appendix G

LLF participant theme transcripts

Transcripts have been removed at the request of the viva examiner. A copy of the transcripts can be obtained via the researcher.

Appendix H

LLF participant theme tables

The following pages reflect the data tables created from my own personal thematic analysis. As will be seen, some themes were created that were not then used as wider themes, or the quotations within them may have then fit into the wider three themes discussed within this thesis.

Theme	Sub-theme	Quotation/idea
Bisexual identity and lived experience	Bisexual erasure and (mis)understandings	LLF002: 'It's the worst of the worst of it all, bisexuals must, by definition, be unfaithful. Had they actually talked to anybody? Did they know people who were living as bisexual[s] [people]? Did they have any idea at all? Probably not' LLF002: 'But that movement [Living Out] also erases the term 'bi' because there's no recognition' LLF002: "'Bi' seems to have had more erasure than any other group, which is extraordinary' LLF001: 'If you are a bi person in some way, you are already open to the idea that you know things don't necessarily fall into neat binaries actually that might have an impact on your spirituality and the way that you see yourself in relation to, like, a mainstream faith tradition, as well' LLF002: '...because they're in a relationship with someone of the opposite sex, they're concealed' LLF002: '...with the people in the LO movement, I'm alarmed that none of them, as far as I know, says 'I am bi'. It's, again, you can't say' LLF002: 'Bisexuality has had more erasure than any other group, which is extraordinary' LLF004: 'It tends to be a forgotten and hidden dimension' LLF003: It's as if people just don't get what orientation means [...] it involves a misunderstanding so basic that it just infuriates me' LLF001: 'If you are a bi person in some way you are already open to the idea that you know things don't necessarily fall into neat binaries actually that might have an impact on your spirituality and the way that you see yourself in relation to, like, a mainstream faith tradition, as well' LLF004: 'Life on the ground for LGBT people can be very painful, people can feel that they need to leave their churches... their reality, their experiences [are] denied and I guess, this is what's behind your project really, about a particular narrative, a really hopeless narrative about bi people, because bi people are particularly hidden' LLF004: 'So clearly there is a stigma around bisexuality, it is... it's hidden as well, the stigma is not. Well it wasn't hidden in <i>Issues</i>, they came out and said it there, but it seems that the Church is uncomfortable, it

		feels as if the Church is uncomfortable with this dimension, because it does like everything in neat little boxes and everything tied up and sweet and rosy. It doesn't like complexity. It doesn't like difference' LLF004: 'Hiding in plain sight' / 'bisexuality is a forgotten and hidden dimension
	Support for bisexuals	LLF001: 'I don't, again this doesn't mean they don't exist, but I don't know of any groups that are specifically set up to support bi Christians [...] maybe the fact I don't know is significant' LLF003: 'I'm not aware of, as it were, officially sanctioned and supported groups providing support in the Church of England, and I mean I would love there to be more support. It's hard to believe at the moment, and unless things change, at the moment I wouldn't really trust a kind of official Church of England support group, given that the Church of England's official teaching doesn't really support bisexual people, or people in same-sex relationships or a whole range of other people' LLF003: 'With people joining it [some kind of church group] they'd have to worry about whether they were going to be being, sort of, subtly pushed in the direction of the Church's current official teaching on it [bisexuality], or whether it was going to be constrained in the support it would offer by not saying anything that would rock the boat; all those questions [need to be considered]' LLF003: 'No, I don't think we've got close yet' [to texts reflecting lived experience] LLF004: 'It's important now [that] people do feel the confidence to come out and to speak up because it just helps everybody. It's not just about your community as bi or trans or intersex, it's about helping everybody' LLF004: 'But actually life on the ground for LGBT people can be very painful, people can feel that they need to leave their churches, their reality, their experiences [are] denied and I guess, this is what's behind your project really, about a particular narrative, a really hopeless narrative about bi people, because bi people are particularly hidden' LLF001: 'Maybe the fact I don't know is significant' LLF003: 'I'm not aware of, as it were, officially sanctioned and supported groups providing support in the Church of England, and I mean I would love there to be more support. It's hard to believe at the moment, and unless things change, at the moment I wouldn't really trust a kind of official Church of England support group, given that the Church of England's official teaching doesn't really support bisexual people, or people in same-sex relationships or a whole range of other people'

		LLF001: ‘I don’t know of any groups that are specifically set up to support bi Christians’ LLF005: • Unsure of any bisexual-specific support groups - this would have to ideally be confirmed by a bisexual person • It is vital that the environment within the Church is such that bisexuals could approach these groups with confidence and support; that is, without a fear that they may be welcomed yet not affirmed • Until the CofE becomes an environment in which a bisexual person can walk into any church and feel welcomed, then there is still so much work to do

Theme	Sub-theme	Quotation/idea
Language	Broader document comments	LLF004: ‘Look, these documents can only be inadequate, of course they can, because we don’t know who the bisexuals were behind <i>Issues</i>, if any, [comment redacted due to Chatham House rules] we don’t know the bisexual input into Pilling [...], it appears that there weren’t any openly bi people involved in the groups of <i>Living in Love and Faith</i>. This is one of the things I keep talking about - the lack of experience’ LLF002: ‘They [Church of England policy documents] don’t, they don’t reflect a lot of people’s lived experience I expect. But certainly bisexual, no, not there at all’ LLF001: Discussions about The Osbourne Report - ‘far more kind of liberal [...] were far more open but actually, they didn’t land because the landscape was not such that they could have landed at that time, if you see what I mean’ LLF004: ‘There’s a whole swathe of experience that is just not represented in these documents, in the way that earlier on it was tran and intersex, now it’s bisexuality that seems to be a missing element’ LLF001: The Pilling Report - ‘invite[d] contributions from lots and lot of different people [...] it was coming from a place of wanting to say ‘look there needs to be consultation, [...] we’re aware that actually we are not entirely equipped necessarily to [...] be able to answer some of this [...] Pilling was really well meaning’
	<i>Living in Love and Faith</i>	LLF002: ‘The invisibility of bisexuality in LLF certainly doesn’t help. Just, you know, acknowledgement that there are people who are bisexual and are Christians, ‘the end’ would be quite useful really’ LLF003: Considering LLF - ‘there were fights over language [...] language that sort of normalised, even mutually described experiences [which] was problematic, precisely because it didn’t problematise’ LLF001: ‘I don’t remember there ever being actually any explicit discussion of bisexuality and I don’t remember bi people ever being mentioned except in the context of ‘lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender’ et cetera’ LLF003: ‘I got involved in LLF explicitly telling myself that, you know, ‘you’re going to do however many years of your life being involved in this, and you’ll probably be ashamed of whatever comes out of it’, given what the Church of England has done in the past’ LLF003: ‘I mean my memory is not fantastic for all of the process - there was an awful lot of it - but I don’t think we ever really had bisexuality as a sort of focus of our discussions [...] I don’t think there was any stage where we sort of took a step back and said ‘well how does this look from the point of bisexuality?’ and, you know, ‘what bisexual people have we got involved?’, scrutinising from that angle’

		LLF001: ‘A missed opportunity’ LLF002: ‘There was some suggestion that [...] would suggest that <i>LLF</i> could take over [from <i>Issues</i>], but how can <i>LLF</i> take over when the whole point of the document is that it does give more than one viewpoint? There’s a certain amount of ‘some of us think that, but others think this’. So how can you have a document that you have to say you’ve read and you will live within it if it says ‘some people say this, some people say that’? Why bother with a document?’ LLF003: LLF - ‘for all its failings [...] [emphasise how] dated and problematic’ <i>Issues</i> is LLF005: • LLF has been an extraordinary project, unlike equivalent attempts to inform and discern • The LLF project has been ambitious, and through its educational programme has drawn many people into the conversation of sexuality, which has been a struggle in the CofE’s past • There will often be situations where the text may be set alongside previous documents and will be named as the ‘latest equivalent’ • LLF is far more than just a 450-plus-page book and study programme and should not be compared to documents from the past, as it attempts to tackle issues in a different way • Proud to be associated with <i>LLF</i> • It attempts to provide a fresh look at human sexuality • LLF, very deliberately, does not reach a conclusion; the aim of the text is to form a discernment process, to allow the CofE to be led by the Holy Spirit • Therefore, it cannot be the ‘next’ document, in other words, a replacement to <i>Issues</i> • LLF does not attempt to define a new position for the Church, but instead wants to inform conversations • LLF005 agrees that the language in <i>Issues</i> does not reflect the lived experience of bisexual people and hopes that LLF does this more adequately - but it is up to bisexual people to say whether or not this is the case
	<i>Issues in Human Sexuality</i>	LLF002: ‘You’d expect some sort of engagement with people who have actually experienced this, but no. It’s sort of comparable to how you could write in the past, you could write about women without ever talking to a woman’ LLF002: ‘I honestly don’t know, there’s no evidence in the document [<i>Issues</i>] that they did [talk to bisexual people] is there?’ LLF003: ‘<i>Issues</i> represents only one very narrow part of the spectrum of Church of England opinion’

		LLF002: 'That use of the term 'homophilia', which they presumably had because they wanted to talk about people who are attracted to the same sex, but they couldn't cope with the idea of them actually doing anything with their bodies [...] It's quite extraordinary because [...] no one uses that word' LLF002: 'Clinical in a bad way, yeah, like bisexuals are just sort of a weird species that we might just pin down on the board, like a butterfly or something and go 'ooh'' LLF003: '[It] sort of seems to be a background assumption, similar assumptions seem to be a background idea still for some participants in Church of England debates and I can't believe we haven't got past that, it seems so infantile as a misunderstanding - sorry, infantile is the wrong word because children are more sensible than that - but it's just so basic a misunderstanding. I can't believe we still have to fight it' LLF002: 'There is that word 'assent', you know, what does 'assent' mean? And you assent to Issues, does it mean you agree with it, or does it mean you assent to the existence of a document called Issues?' LLF001: 'The reason for that choice of language was that it was well intended, [and] what it intended to do was to... say same-sex relationships shouldn't be thought of as being about sex in a way that heterosexual relationships are not. So in other words wanting to get away from the idea that actually it's all about who has sex with who, and wanting to say [...] who someone is in love with, and who someone... wants to forge a long term bond with [...] I think that a lot of that was behind the choice of the terminology of homophile rather than homosexual, wanting to emphasise love and relationship rather than sexual activity' LLF001: 'This language of promiscuity is, it's horrible language anyway [...] the assumption that bisexuality equals promiscuity [...] kind of stems from a misunderstanding of what bisexuality as an orientation is. Now undoubtedly there are some bisexual people who are in open and polyamorous relationships, but that's not because they're bisexual' LLF001: 'The discussion of bisexuality, particularly in Issues is... it's clearly really problematic because actually it doesn't represent, you know, it seems to be based on just a misunderstanding, a kind of mis-definition, because it carries the assumption that if you are a bisexual that means by definition you will be in relationships with people of different sexes at the same time. So almost a conflation of bisexuality with polyamory, not that they say that explicitly, but that's what the logic seems to be' LLF001: 'It's sort of staggering that it [Issues] still has the status that it has, kind of all this time later [...] I'm sure you know that actually Issues was [...] a step again in a more conservative direction, in comparison to some of the other explorations that had taken place before...' LLF004: 'What's wrong with being ambiguous?'

		LLF002: ‘The most dated thing imaginable’ LLF001: ‘It’s sort of staggering that it [Issues] still has the status that it has, kind of all this time later [...] I’m sure you know that actually Issues was [...] a step again in a more conservative direction, in comparison to some of the other explorations that had taken place before...’ LLF003: ‘A dreadful document’ / ‘really painful to read’ LLF004: ‘It’s utterly shocking to hear people described in that way, as promiscuous - it’s ill-informed, and you know, on that basis alone, it should not be a document that the Church is using’ LLF003: Considering homophile - ‘weird habit of using language that no one else uses’ LLF004: ‘This document should be withdrawn as soon as possible’ LLF004: ‘When [comment redacted due to Chatham House rules] was asked about it [Issues], [<i>they</i>] said ‘you have to live by it, you don’t have to agree with it, but you have to live by it’ LLF004: ‘It is... shocking, utterly shocking, that this document became used, as a way, as a test for ordinands’ LLF005: • Although there has been a minor history of suggesting promiscuity in the Church, it is a mistake to categorise any group of people as promiscuous • It is not acceptable to categorise people as promiscuous • It is not helpful, it is a generalisation, and there are many examples in the Church of faithful and committed relationships among bisexual people; therefore - where does this idea actually come from? • It is ‘long overdue’ that we recognise the faithfulness and commitment of bisexual people, instead of creating a sweeping stereotype for an entire community • There is a distinction to be made between policy settlement enshrined in Issues, which remains current, and language which is transparently outdated • Issues is ‘toe-curlingly out of date’ and the language is not appropriate to our current culture. As a document, Issues is ‘well past its’ sell-by date [and] long overdue for a revision. It’s become embarrassing that this is our last statement on these matters’

Theme	Sub-theme	Quotation/idea
Church of England attitudes towards...	Marriage	LLF001: Allowing same-gender marriage would - 'be to change the definition of marriage'. That would be problematic because that would be [...], regardless of what you think about that theologically, that would kind of be a break with tradition' LLF002: Considering a CofE marriage advert - 'extraordinarily tone deaf [...], utterly insensitive'
	Sexuality as a whole	LLF002: 'The history of the Church of England and dealing with sexuality, 'dealing' with it, well that's revealing isn't it, that there's something really difficult, [something] we have to deal with rather than something we can get on with' LLF002: 'They [LLF] have talked to people whose sexuality is not heterosexual, whose identity is not 'cishet' and they are not, they're not denying that people exist but they are... marginalising them' LLF002: In the Church - 'we must be very big on concealing our identity, and trying to present as just totally, you know, 'always been heterosexual, never had any feelings about the opposite sex''

Appendix I

Focus group notes and comments

These notes were collated during the focus group process, and were sent to participants after the sessions via email.

These comments will - if necessary - form the basis for new questions. The completed set of questions, which will be asked in the interviews, will be placed at the end of this document.

Focus group 1: Wednesday 26th January 2022, 8:00pm - 9:30pm

Unable to attend focus groups: Ben (pseudonym), Lauren (pseudonym), Ruth (pseudonym)

In attendance: Harriet McInerney (researcher), Samantha (pseudonym), Jessica (pseudonym), Katie (pseudonym)

A comment made early on that was quite prevalent/common among the group was that participants had not really met other bisexual Christians before.

Potential question idea: the concept of marriage to bisexual Christians - one participant mentioned that their partner is non-binary, which brings another level/element to the argument of heterosexual marriage = yes, 'homosexual' marriage = no, with celibacy encouraged.

Discussions were had surrounding the differences between sex and sexuality, and the guilt that can come with these conversations.

There is often a confusion between the two.

Potential question idea: Unity in the Church, and how as bisexuals we believe this could be achieved? Where might you sit as a queer Christian on this debate?

Discussion was had about a gay priest who gave a talk, stating that queer Christians should stop separating themselves from those who are unhappy with LGBT+ people in the Church etc; but why would you want to surround yourselves with those who don't think our lives are valid? This is a bad situation for the sake of unity.

You can choose to have these encounters, but also have to look after yourself. There is an argument (more from the conservative side) that argues if you don't want to have these discussions (i.e. LGBT+ people talking to conservatives) then you, as the LGBT+ person, are the issue.

Potential question idea: Family - learning about your upbringings, when your Christian faith was introduced into your life (was this because of family, or did you come to faith by yourself?), what your home church is like potentially in comparison to another church (university, moving away etc.)

'Textbook' definitions of faith and sexuality - how do our upbringings have an effect on this, alongside our thoughts on sexuality etc?

A prominent thought discussed was that of our 'straight side' - is this something we are all happy to 'accept' we have, or do you find this to be a frustrating concept/one that shouldn't exist?

THE FUTURE OF THE COFE - how can things change? What are the nuances of getting there?

- How many steps are in between where we are and where we want to be?
- Looking at societal changes as a whole, especially in the Church - what has changed so far, and how can we chart this projection?

Textual discussions: Thinking about Issues in Human Sexuality and its authority now, how Living in Love and Faith is not necessarily for queer Christians with a base knowledge of theological/sexual issues.

- However, despite this (annoyingly), the only people who seem to be engaging with LLF are those with an interest in this area.
- LLF is very much a 'hand hold' for those who don't understand.
- Church of England Evangelical Council did a video response to LLF called 'A Beautiful Story' - they state that 'same sex attracted' people should be celibate and that there is a sanctity in male/female relationships.
- The Student Christian Movement did a response to the above.

Focusing on Question 3 from the provided question sheet - 'Do you feel like your faith 'identity' and your sexual 'identity' ever come together, or do you choose to keep them separate?'

- Participants thought this was an interesting and good question :) - How are we 'in touch' with both 'sides' of our identity? Knowing when to be in touch with different sides of yourself (depending on situation etc.) - the duality of self and conflict with environments, masking, security and mental wellbeing.
- As bisexual Christians, what do we want? What kind of affirmation are we seeking? Do we want to walk into a church and be able to proclaim "I'm bisexual!", or do we just want it to be 'normal'?

Focus group 2: Saturday 29th January 2022, 1:00pm - 2:30pm

In attendance: Harriet McInerney (researcher), Mia (pseudonym), Eve (pseudonym), Leah (pseudonym), Danielle (pseudonym)

Discussions had surrounding the difference in our church backgrounds, and how this can affect our identity.

- How can university affect the above, for those who went?
- How can this affect our faith, and perceptions of faith, especially with organisations like the CU being such big faith presences on campus?
- Sexuality also - 'formative views' from these experiences.
- How can growing up in a different church (and then moving to the CofE) affect someone's views?
- To ask participants - does everyone go to university?

Coming out in churches - the dynamic of when this happens - after university, during university, when moving back home from being away?

Generational understandings of bisexuality - how does this affect our understandings of ourselves, our coming out stories etc?

There is often an assumption that because you are active in the church, you must therefore be straight and have a certain set of values/opinions.

- How can this affect our safety?
- Potential question idea: Allies and allyship: allies are great to have, but they don't necessarily understand our issues and what we go through - what are the issues surrounding this?
- To link to the above, contrasts of experiences of allyship/homophobia within the Church.
- Allyship intersecting with attitudes of ignorance and harmfulness - what education can be offered from this?
- Potential question idea: For those who work within/actively volunteer within the CofE, how does this affect your identity?

Thought: is celibacy used as a shield for intolerance? E.g. "we will like you if you're celibate" - what kind of effect does this have on a bisexual person?

Validity - why are those who are homosexual seen as more 'valid' than bisexuals?

Something to look up - the United Reformed Church 'One plus One' project.

What organisations are available that can offer resources and a sense of community?

Do we all have a personal bi activism?

How important is being bi in relation to being queer? - how does this affect us with coming out, how we live our lives etc? - Is having a bisexual space as important as having a queer space? Especially in the Church.

Questions for interview

The original questions (emailed out previously) have been included here, with new questions included in green:

How long have you been worshipping in the Church of England and what is your faith life like?

The above question may then lead me to ask:

Were you raised in the Church of England by your family/carers, or was worshipping a personal choice?

Were you part of any other Christian denomination before joining the Church of England?

Do you feel as if your Church upbringing has had an impact on your attitudes towards your own sexuality, and sexuality as a whole?

Besides your home church, have you ever worshipped anywhere else? E.g. a university church, living away from home etc.

You identify as bisexual – please can you explain to me what this means to you?

Do you feel like your faith ‘identity’ and your sexual ‘identity’ ever come together, or do you choose to keep them separate?

The above question may then lead me to ask:

In what ways do you feel ‘in touch’ with both sides of your identity?

Do you ever feel the need to hide your faith or your sexuality in certain contexts/’mask’ who you are, in order to protect your wellbeing?

Do you feel, as a young bisexual Christian, that there is support for you in the Church?

As a bisexual Christian, do you feel like you have to seek affirmation in the Church for who you are?

Can you explain why you do/do not feel you need to do this?

Do you feel like you have allies within the Church? Or, contrasting this, do you ever feel like you’ve experienced explicit biphobia within the Church?

The Church of England still states that marriage is solely between a man and a woman, and encourages celibacy for those in non-heterosexual relationships. What do you think about the Church’s attitude towards marriage, and how does this affect you as a bisexual?

Are you aware of Church of England documents such as Issues in Human Sexuality or Living in Love and Faith? If so, what do these documents mean to you or do you have any thoughts on them?

The above question may then lead me to ask:

Are you aware of the Church of England Evangelical Council’s video ‘A Beautiful Story’? What did you think of it?

Are you aware of any other denominational documents/videos/courses etc. that talk about human sexuality?

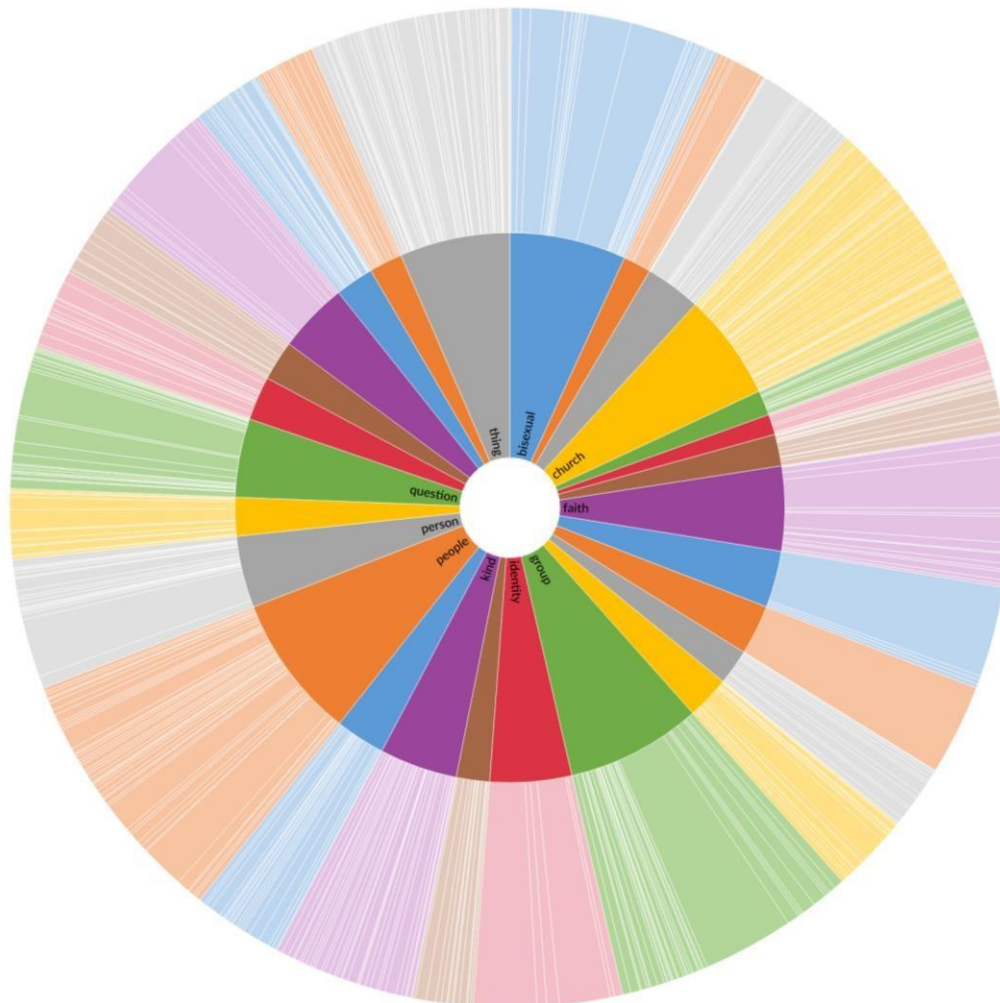
As Christians we believe in the importance of unity - how, as a bisexual, do you think we could achieve unity in the Church, between ourselves and those who question our validity and existence?

Appendix J

Nvivo software data analysis

All 13 transcripts, alongside the guidance notes for LLF005, were updated to the NVivo software and ‘autocoded’ to search for themes. The software immediately picked up 546 ‘items’, which were broken down into larger codes. This original distribution can be seen below:

Figure A1: NVivo autocode thematic presentation



As shown, some of the main themes collated from the autocode are already slightly representative of the themes that emerged from my own personal thematic analysis. Some filler words, such as ‘um’ or ‘thing’ (with the latter shown above) also appeared, and were therefore deleted from the autocode list.

The table below presents a breakdown of the above circular diagram in more detail, including some of the subthemes that have grown from the autocoded themes:

Figure A2: Thematic and sub-thematic breakdown



Below, I have chosen to present the sub-themes that have been developed through the autocoding process. The left numerical column shows the amount of files in which the code appeared (out of a potential 14), and the right shows the amount of references across those files.

Figures A3 to A6: Files and references coding

☐ bisexual	12	55
☐ actually bisexuality	1	1
☐ around bisexuality	1	1
☐ bisexual activity	3	3
☐ bisexual christians	6	8
☐ bisexual community	1	1
☐ bisexual experience	1	1
☐ bisexual group	1	1
☐ bisexual label	1	1
☐ bisexual participants	1	1
☐ bisexual parts	1	1
☐ bisexual people	7	9
☐ bisexual person	7	13
☐ bisexual priests	1	1
☐ bisexual promiscuity	1	1
☐ bisexual side	1	1
☐ bisexual sort	1	1
☐ bisexual support organisations	1	1
☐ bisexual women	1	2
☐ bisexual world	1	1
☐ bisexuality paragraph	1	1
☐ bisexuality passage	1	1
☐ bisexuality section	1	1
☐ describing bisexuality	1	1
☐ really bisexual	1	1
☐ surrounding bisexuality	1	1

To use the above as an example: the phrase ‘bisexual Christians’ appeared within 6 of the 14 documents, and was referred to 8 times in total across those 6 documents.

☐ christian	11	28
☐ bad christian	1	1
☐ bi christian	1	1
☐ bisexual christians	6	8
☐ christian community	1	1
☐ christian concept	1	1
☐ christian context	1	1
☐ christian events	1	1
☐ christian friends	1	2
☐ christian households	1	1
☐ christian identity	1	1
☐ christian organisation	1	1
☐ christian person	1	1
☐ christian settings	1	1
☐ christian space	1	1
☐ gay christian	1	1

☐ church	12	53
☐ actual church	2	2
☐ aging church	1	1
☐ beautiful churches	1	1
☐ church audience	1	1
☐ church choir	1	1
☐ church communities	2	2
☐ church community	1	1
☐ church context	1	1
☐ church documents	1	1
☐ church events	1	1
☐ church groups	3	4
☐ church hierarchy	1	1
☐ church kind	1	1
☐ church leaders	1	1
☐ church meeting	1	1
☐ church setting	1	1
☐ church sort	2	2
☐ church spaces	1	1
☐ church wedding	1	1
☐ church woman	1	1
☐ congregational church	1	1
☐ current church	1	1
☐ dar churches	1	1
☐ day-to-day church environments	1	2
☐ different churches	3	3
☐ dream church	1	1
☐ evangelical church	1	1
☐ future churches	1	1
☐ individual church	2	3
☐ institutional church	1	1
☐ local churches	1	1
☐ methodist church	1	1
☐ morning church	1	1
☐ parents church	1	1
☐ parish churches	1	1
☐ right church	1	1
☐ rural church	1	1
☐ specific church	2	2

○ marriage	11	32
○ 2023 marriage club	1	1
○ actual marriage ceremony	1	1
○ actually marriage	1	1
○ gay marriage	3	5
○ gender marriages	1	2
○ heterosexual marriage	2	3
○ heterosexual marriage couple	1	1
○ historical marriages	1	2
○ holy marriage	1	1
○ marriage attitude	1	1
○ marriage course	1	1
○ obviously marriage	1	1
○ open marriage	1	1
○ pro marriage	1	1
○ real marriage	1	1
○ religious marriage	1	1
○ same-sex marriages	1	1
○ sex marriage	4	4
○ straight marriage	1	1
○ took marriage oaths	1	1
○ view marriage	1	1

Utilising NVivo has been an interesting process to undertake within this research study. I noted that, in comparison to my personal thematic analysis, there was no particular theme that emerged focusing on language, although when looking for quotations, these discussions were very prevalent within other themes – mainly with a focus on particular words.

NVivo's themes seemed to be very 'person-focused'. When allowing software to autocode themes, it is thought-provoking to see how these themes are chosen: from the above, it is quite obvious that the software focuses in on a repetition of words or phrases, with less of a focus on wider ideas, or what participants may be discussing in a wider context.

Appendix K

Guidance document

Throughout this thesis, I argue that the data analysed has presented a myriad of options to consider when thinking about how churches within the CofE can be bisexual-inclusive. In the document on the following three pages, I have produced a short guidance piece that will encourage churches to think about how they can query whether or not their actions and values include, welcome, and affirm the bisexual community.

Churches: Do you feel that you are bisexual inclusive?

What does this question mean to you? What does it lead you to consider?

In 2023, Bishops in the Church of England released a set of follow-up statements to *Living in Love and Faith*. In one of their statements, they apologised for their lack of understanding surrounding certain communities, including the bisexual community, and stated that they were willing to learn more about the bisexual community – but what *is* their plan of action?

Bisexuality is not talked about very much in the Church of England. In 1991, the Church said that bisexuals are promiscuous, ambiguous, and in need of inner healing (*Issues in Human Sexuality*, p. 42). No further comments have ever really been made on this language, and the removal of *Issues* from the ordination process hasn't fully removed this language from memory. *Living in Love and Faith*, published in 2020, says a bit about bisexuality, but doesn't give much insight into the community.

As churches, you may be thinking: what do I actually know about bisexuality?

Do I have bisexual people in my congregation? Aren't bisexual experiences just the same as lesbian and gay Christians?

The answer to that last question, in particular, is no. Bisexuals are incredibly unique, and face their own challenges and complexities within Christian life. So, what can you do to move towards bisexual inclusivity within the Church?

The guidance presented within this document comes from a 4-year research study. During this period, I interviewed **9** bisexual Christians who worship within the Church of England, to find out about their lived experiences, and how they 'exist' within the Church and form a bisexual Christian identity. For some this has been really easy, and for others it has been a more difficult and painful journey. I also interviewed **5** individuals involved with the *Living in Love and Faith* process, to find out what those involved in Church policies and publications at a higher level know about bisexuality, and its inclusion (or potentially lack of) within the Church of England.

The aim of this guidance is not to change your churches completely. You may have different views to what is shared here, and that is okay! However, I hope that this guidance will lead you to consider how your congregation can be welcoming to all, including those who identify as bisexual.

How do bisexuals feel within the Church of England?

It's important to realise that not every bisexual will feel what is shared below. However, there are bisexuals within the Church who do feel this way, and these feelings should be recognised, respected, and acted upon.

As my data has shown, some bisexuals feel that the Church sees them as ‘wrong’, because of their attraction to more than one gender. Because of this, some bisexuals feel that they have to hide their identity in church, or they struggle to create a meaningful bond for themselves between their sexuality and their faith. Some bisexuals do not feel that there is a space for them in the Church, and that their identity is not recognised or understood. They do not believe that there are specific support services for them, or spaces in which they can flourish within their identity. Finally, for some bisexuals, they feel upset or hurt, or like they are betraying a part of their identity, when considering the prospect of marriage in the Church of England.

What actions can we take to become more bisexual inclusive?

Churches can adopt several strategies to become more inclusive of bisexual individuals, fostering a welcoming and supportive environment. Here are some key steps:

Educate the congregation through workshops and training: Offer to run, and take part in, regular educational workshops and training sessions on LGBT+ issues, specifically addressing the unique experiences and challenges faced by bisexual individuals. This could include inviting bisexual speakers and LGBT+ advocates to share their stories and insights during services or special events.

Encourage inclusive language in sermons and church communications: Ensure that sermons, prayers, and church communications use inclusive language that acknowledges and respects bisexual identities. Avoid assuming everyone is straight or fitting into a binary understanding of sexuality.

Literature and resources: Provide literature and resources that address bisexuality in a positive and affirming manner.

Encourage the creation of support groups: Create support groups specifically for bisexual individuals where they can share experiences and find community within your church.

Policy and practice changes: Where possible, encourage, implement, and enforce non-discrimination policies that explicitly protect bisexual individuals from harassment and discrimination within the church community.

Practice visible affirmation: Display symbols of inclusion, such as the bisexual pride flag, within the church premises to signal a welcoming environment. You can also actively participate in local and national LGBT+ events, such as Pride parades, and encourage the congregation to join in solidarity.

Inclusive theological reflection: Engage in theological reflection and study that explores and affirms the place of bisexual individuals within the faith, challenging any doctrines or interpretations that exclude or marginalise them.

Marriage: Consider the ways in which discussions of marriage, and actions surrounding it, could be difficult for bisexuals, and offer support, space and guidance for those who may wish to open discussions surrounding the marriage process.

Where can we turn to for support or to learn more?

There are a variety of organisations that exist to promote inclusivity within Christian spaces, who can support you in your move to becoming a more inclusive church space, including for the bisexual community. These include:

Inclusive Church: <https://www.inclusive-church.org/>

OneBodyOneFaith: <https://onebodyonefaith.org.uk/>

Student Christian Movement: <https://www.movement.org.uk/>

Open Table Network: <https://opentable.lgbt/>

The LGBT+ organisation **Stonewall** also offers advice on how to become a bisexual ally: <https://www.stonewall.org.uk/about-us/news/10-ways-you-can-step-ally-bi-people>

If it is accessible to you, and you would like to read some further research on bisexuality within the Church of England, scholars such as Andrew Kam Tuk Yip, Alex Toft, and Carol Shepherd have written a variety of articles and books that focus on the experiences of bisexual Christians. Shepherd has also written a book about pastoring to bisexual Christians, entitled *Bi: The Way: Pastoring Bisexual Christians in Europe*.

Some final points to remember:

Learning about different communities takes time – don't expect to know everything and be making changes straight away.

Take time to listen to the experiences of bisexuals – they may be hurt, angry, or have mixed feelings about their relationship with the Church. Similarly, they may have an excellent relationship with their faith.

Remember that, whilst members of the LGBT+ community do face similar issues, this does not mean that every issue can be tackled in the same way.

Taking the time to learn and figure things out is a positive step forward – use your voice to support the bisexual community, but at the same time, use your voice to ask questions if you are unsure.