BISEXUAL WOMEN’S VISUAL IDENTITIES:

A FEMINIST MIXED-METHODS EXPLORATION

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FOR
REFERENCE
ONLY

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the University of the West of England, Bristol for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Faculty of Health and Life Sciences, University of the West of England, Bristol

August 2011
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Abstract

The majority of research on bisexuality does not take into account the importance of bisexual visual identities. Appearance has often been trivialised, despite it being an integral part of forming and expressing our identities. A small body of literature on lesbians and gay men’s visual identities has found that appearance norms can serve a number of positive functions, including identity formation and maintenance, ‘coming out’ (signalling sexuality to others), recognition, attracting a partner, resisting heteronormativity, forming communities, and safe-guarding such spaces from voyeuristic or homophobic others. However, very little is understood about bisexual people’s visual identities. The feminist research reported in this thesis provides a mixed methods exploration (using semi-structured face-to-face interviews and photomethodology with 20 self-identified bisexual women, a quantitative questionnaire completed by a total of 494 bisexual, lesbian and heterosexual women, and a qualitative survey completed by 176 predominantly heterosexual university students) of bisexual women’s visual identities. The findings highlight that binary constructions of sexuality remain dominant within psychology and the wider culture. These dichotomous understandings are problematic for bisexual people because they continually position heterosexuality and homosexuality as the only viable identity options. This has resulted in the dismissal and marginalisation of bisexual women and their identity. This research fills a gap in knowledge around bisexual women’s appearance practices and (lack of) visual identities. A key finding was that bisexual women experience their identity in ways which are distinct from either lesbians or heterosexual women. Bisexual and heterosexual participants were able to describe visual images associated with lesbian, gay, and heterosexual identities, but in stark contrast they were unable to recognise any equivalent bisexual appearance norms or a bisexual visual identity. This raises a number of issues around the implications of bisexual women’s lack of validation and visibility, and highlights the necessity for psychologists to recognise the existence of bisexuality in order to address the continued overlooking and marginalisation of bisexual women and their identities.
Introducing appearance and visual identities

This thesis reports a feminist social constructionist mixed-methods programme of research on bisexual visual identities. The research is situated at the boundaries of three key research areas, which are interdisciplinary research on appearance, feminist psychology, and LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer) psychology.

In this introduction, I highlight how appearance research has been undervalued within psychology. I then discuss how appearance and visual identity is an extremely important facet of wider identity. I draw on previous research to illustrate that appearance norms exist, and have served particular functions for lesbians. However, there is minimal research on bisexual identity, let alone bisexual appearance, which means that few conclusions can be drawn about bisexual visual identity. I discuss how the marginalisation of bisexuality within psychology underpins my rationale for conducting this research. I then outline the approaches which this research draws upon, and contributes to. The chapter ends with a discussion of my aims and research questions, and an outline of the thesis.

A brief background to appearance and identity research

Within mainstream psychology, research on appearance is located mainly within health psychology, and has tended to focus on ‘visible differences’ and ‘body image’. Visible differences research has used a mixture of methods, but has been predominantly quantitative in its approach. It has focused on the appearance and wellbeing of those with congenital ‘disfigurements’ (e.g., cleft lip and palate, birthmarks), and those acquired later in life (e.g., burns and scarring) (e.g., Rumsey, 2002; Rumsey, Clarke, White, Wyn-Williams & Garlick, 2004; Rumsey & Harcourt, 2004; 2005; Maddern, Cadogan & Emerson, 2006; Bessell, Clarke, Harcourt, Moss & Rumsey, 2010). Other researchers have investigated the impact of treatment for illnesses, such as cancer, on patients’ appearance (e.g., Frith, Harcourt & Fussell, 2007; Harcourt & Frith, 2008). The psychological research on body image and body size also consists of mainly quantitative research, focused on eating behaviours and/or body esteem/dissatisfaction (e.g., Sarwer, Thompson & Cash, 2005; O’Brien, Hunter, Halberstadt & Anderson, 2007; Strahan, Spencer & Zanna, 2007; Bailey & Ricciardelli, 2010; Menzel, Schaefer, Burke, Mayhew, Brannick & Thompson, 2010). This literature includes comparisons of lesbian, bisexual, and heterosexual women’s body image and
(dis)satisfaction (e.g., Beren, Hayden, Wilfley & Grilo, 1996; Share & Mintz, 2002; Koff, Lucas, Migliorini & Grossmith, 2010), which is discussed in Chapter Eight. However, what is surprising is the lack of research into appearance and 'identity' more widely, particularly given that 'identity' and 'social identity' have received a great deal of focus, and been central concepts within social psychology (e.g., Tajfel & Turner, 1979; 1986; Hogg, Terry & White, 1995; Hogg & Terry, 2000).

**Personal and social identities**

Broadly speaking personal 'identity' can be understood as our own individual sense of who one is. How we conceive of our own personal identities is also embedded in the social contexts in which we exist, and bound up in how we relate to others and their identities (Hitlin, 2003; Howard, 2000). We have also traditionally been understood to have a wider sense of social identity, whereby our personal identities enable us to become (or disable us from becoming) members of particular locations and groups. We often distinguish and interpret our own 'personal identities' through the 'social identity' categories that we feel we fit within the boundaries of, for example, our age bracket, social class, political and religious beliefs, ethnicity, gender, sexuality and so on (Hogg & Terry, 2000; Howard, 2000; Stets & Burke, 2000; Hitlin, 2003).

During the 1970s and 1980s cognitive psychologists focused on the notion of Social Identity Theory (S.I.T.) and how our personal and social identities enable us to feel that we belong within certain groups, which in turn leads us to be aware of (and potentially discriminative towards) the groups to which we do not belong (e.g., Tajfel & Turner, 1979; 1986). However, social interactionist scholars have argued that personal and social identity is less mutually exclusive than earlier cognitive theories implied. Instead, they proposed that our understanding of our personal identity and sense of self is actually dependent upon the context of the social locations which we occupy, and the social interactions which occur in these spaces (e.g., Antaki, Condor & Levine, 1996; also see, Howard, 2000). This links with more recent sociological and social constructionist theories, which this thesis draws on most heavily. Social constructionists argue that identity is not necessarily stable, rigid and fixed, and instead can be conceived of as an active process, a fluid and ever changing set of negotiations that we perform within political and social contexts, and which enable us to feel a sense of belonging (Howard, 2000; Griffin, 2011). Social constructionist scholars have also placed emphasis on language, and have focused on the way in
which we discursively construct and negotiate our identities through our experiences (Kitzinger & Wilkinson, 1995; Howard, 2000). These understandings suggest that rather than identity being conceived of on a single dimension, instead our multiple identities can be understood to be inextricably bound up with other. Since the mid 1990s, scholars have also engaged in discussions of the complex intersectionality of our identities (Crenshaw, 1993; Howard, 2000; Fish, 2008) a concept which is discussed in relation to bisexual women later in this chapter.

**Sexual identities**

It has been argued that identity is all the more salient for lesbians and gay men (and bisexual people) because their sexual identities do not fit within western culture’s normative and hegemonic heterosexual identity (Holt & Griffin, 2003). Early discussions of sexual identity were largely heterosexist, in that they ‘equated sexuality with heterosexuality’ (Edwards & Brooks, 1999:51). From the 1970s through to the 1990s, lesbian (often feminist) scholars focused on theorising what constituted the social, sexual, and political boundaries of belonging within, an ‘authentic’ lesbian identity (Ponse, 1978; Rich, 1980; Golden, 1987; 1996; Richardson, 1990; Brown, 1995). What defines sexual identity has also been debated by social psychologists more widely. Sexual identity has been defined as relating to sexual attractions and practices, as a performance of identity, as a shared ‘minority’ category, and as signifying a political movement (see, Hegarty & Massey, 2007). No firm conclusions have been drawn on how to best define sexual identity, nor on whether sexual identity is ‘born or made’, and essentialist and social constructionist understandings of identity are discussed further later in this chapter in the section on approaches to psychology.

What has also arisen from discussions of sexual identity is the notion, most commonly attributed to French philosopher Michel Foucault (1926-1984), that sexual identities are both socially constructed and regulated through the lens of hegemonic heterosexuality. Foucault argued that our sense of self and others is produced through the knowledge and language that we have available to us, namely that heterosexuality is constituted as normal and legitimate in contrast to lesbian and gay (and bisexual) sexuality which is subordinated as ‘other’, and that sexual identity has far reaching implications in relation to ‘power, knowledge, and pleasure’ (Edwards & Brooks, 1995:54; Foucault, 1978; 1980). This understanding that to be a gay, lesbian, or bisexual person, is to occupy a position which is othered, because it falls outside
heterosexuality, has remained a consistent thread throughout lesbian (and bisexual) theory (Farquhar, 2000). Foucault was also extremely influential in the more recent theorising around the deconstruction and destabilisation of identity through the advent of queer theory (e.g., Butler, 1990/2006; Du Plessis, 1996), which is discussed in more depth in Chapter Two and Chapter Six.

Appearance and identity

There is minimal psychological research that has considered appearance as an important aspect of identity. What little does exist has been mainly located within British and U.S. qualitative and/or critical social psychology (e.g., Ussher, 1989; Rothblum, 1994a; 2002; Krakauer & Rose, 2002; Frith, 2003; Frith & Gleeson, 2003; 2004; Clarke & Turner, 2007). Due to this lack of focus within psychology on the subject of how appearance and identity are interlinked, in this thesis I necessarily draw upon interdisciplinary literature from sociology, cultural studies, fashion and textiles, and history research, for it is here that most research on how appearance and identity are integral to each other is located (e.g., Davis, 1992; Tseelon, 1995; 2001a; 2001b; Dellinger & Williams, 1997; Guy & Banim, 2000; Winn & Nutt, 2001; Wilkins, 2004). Some of these publications specifically discuss appearance in relation to sexuality, and the findings from this literature are discussed below (e.g., Rothblum, 1994a; 2010; Ainley, 1995; Eves, 2004; Esterberg, 1996a; 1997; Freitas, Kaiser & Hammidi, 1996; Kaiser, 1998; Holliday, 1999; Entwistle, 2000; Levitt, Gerrish & Hiestand, 2003; Clarke & Turner, 2007).

The undervaluing of appearance and appearance research

The reason for the lack of academic literature into appearance and (visual) identity may be due to the perception, as feminist authors have noted, that to ‘engage in research on dress is to place oneself at the fringe of academic respectability’ (Tseelon, 2001b:237). Appearance research has been ‘dismissed as unworthy of serious academic analysis’ (Frith & Gleeson, 2004:40), marginalised as frivolous (Entwistle, 2000), and considered an undeserving ‘topic for serious scholarship’ (Tseelon, 2001a:435), even to the extent of raising concerns in government around funding policies (Tseelon 2001b:237).

Within academia the marginalisation of appearance research can be associated with the marginalisation of women, who are commonly participants in such research
(Tseelon, 2001b; Blood, 2005). Women who have participated in studies around clothing practices have themselves recognised that to invest in appearance is considered vulgar (Guy & Banim, 2000). Bordo (1993) elaborates on this theme, highlighting that women are so commonly considered to be dissatisfied with their appearance that matters of fashion, dress, and appearance are either entirely dismissed, or perceived as existing only to sustain women's amusement, and therefore not to be taken seriously. However, feminist scholars have argued that dominant norms of beauty and femininity are discursively constructed within a social and political context. Therefore how the body is represented has important meaning, including in the oppression of women within patriarchal society (Bordo, 1993; Blood, 2005) (which I discuss in more depth in Chapter Eight).

**Appearance and visual identity**

In this thesis I use the term 'visual identity' to refer to the ways in which we express our broader identities through how we dress and appear. Through our visual identity, our personal, social, and cultural identities can, in effect, be worn upon the body, and our appearance becomes 'a kind of visual metaphor for identity' (Davis, 1992:25). In this sense dress becomes a 'significant marker' (Gleeson & Frith, 2004:104) of our wider identities. When we present our visual identity to others, they are then able to 'read' our appearance, and interpret (their own understandings of) what visual identity indicates about wider personal and social identities (Rudd, 1996; Hethorn & Kaiser, 1998; Gleeson & Frith, 2003). Therefore, appearance can act as a tool of communication, which can enable interpretation of others' characters, social class and status, gender, age, cultural preferences and consumption practices, political beliefs, and, critically for this thesis, sexuality. In sum, we can use our visual identity as a vital and meaningful visual expression of self and identity (e.g., Davis, 1992; Ainley, 1995; Entwistle, 2000; Guy and Banim, 2000) and therefore appearance is not a trivial matter (Guy & Banim, 2000; Frith, 2003; Frith & Gleeson, 2003; 2008).

However, there are two key issues with the idea of appearance as a conduit for communicating our identities to the wider world. The first is that we will be read from our appearance, whether we wish to be or not. The word 'dress' is used as a noun, (to refer to an item of clothing) and a verb (to 'dress oneself') (Barnard, 1996). This highlights that appearance is an active process, which includes choices and decisions. Appearance can be used as a tool, to either hide behind or become noticed by others,
but we cannot choose not to appear (Frith & Gleeson, 2003; 2008), hence we cannot opt out of (the active process of) visual identity. The second issue is that although we can express our identities through our appearance management, we cannot assume that others will ‘read’ us accurately: ‘style is not always worn as an information guide to the person’s life, although it is still often talked about as though it were a mirror to the soul’ (Ainley, 1995:121). Moreover, communicating through appearance is often context dependent, not only by the (limits of) the space which we are in, but also by who occupies that space, and whether others will understand our visual language (Hethorn & Kaiser, 1998; Holt & Griffin, 2003).

Valuing appearance research: what do we know about the function of lesbian (and bisexual) visual identities?

The topic of this thesis is primarily bisexuality and bisexual women, but the content is constrained by the minimal literature on bisexual visual appearance and identities, either within or outside psychology, which in itself provides an example of how bisexuality has been overlooked within the social sciences. In the absence of bisexual specific literature, lesbian appearance can be used as ‘the next best thing’ to illustrate the importance of appearance in relation to individual sexual identity, and wider collective identities. One way in which this thesis is able to offer a unique contribution, and fill a gap in the psychological literature, is to generate further understandings of bisexual appearance and visual identities.

Lesbians (and bisexual women) do not live their lives in a social vacuum, devoid of the influences of their wider (western) culture, within which all women are socialised to value their appearance (Rothblum, 1994a; Guy & Banim, 2000). Although ‘fashion’ (and investment in appearance) has primarily been constructed as a heterosexual pastime (Lewis & Rolley, 1997), lesbians (and perhaps bisexual women) also derive pleasures in managing and constructing their appearance and visual identities, because expressing oneself through dress and appearance is not only functional, but also pleasurable and fun (e.g., Ainley, 1995; Esterberg, 1996a; Lewis & Rolley, 1997).

Lesbian visual identities

A common narrative within the available literature is that when lesbians first ‘realise’ their sexual identity, they are likely to alter their appearance, in order to create a look which adheres to a recognisable lesbian visual identity. In Chapter Two I trace the
Part One  Chapter One: Introducing appearance and visual identities

history of how lesbian ‘looks’ emerged, but here I provide an introductory account of the functions which appearance norms can serve, should lesbians choose to subscribe to them.

The most commonly understood visual images of lesbians are ‘butch’ (extremely masculine) or ‘femme’ (extremely feminine). The butch ‘masculinised’ look is the most documented and recognised of the two, perhaps because a femme look can often be mistakenly read as heterosexual (Maltry & Tucker, 2002; Taylor, 2007). The butch look encompasses short hair, ‘sensible’ or comfortable shoes, particular (placement of) jewellery, tattoos, and piercings, and ‘masculine’ clothing and mannerisms (Rothblum, 1994a; Esterberg, 1996a; Myers, Taub, Morris & Rothblum, 1999; Winn & Nutt, 2001; Krakauer & Rose, 2002; Clarke & Turner, 2007; Johnson, Gill, Reichman & Tessinary, 2007; Rothblum, 2010). However, lesbian looks are plural rather than monolithic (Stein, 1992), and those who are ‘in the know’ (Clarke & Turner, 2007) may recognise a diverse range of nuanced and ever-changing subcultural looks for lesbians1 (e.g., Rothblum 1994a; Esterberg, 1996a; Kaiser, 1998; Winn & Nutt, 2001; Clarke & Turner, 2007).

Lesbians may display their sexuality through appearance norms in order to express, and take pride in, their sexual identity. To ‘dress the part’ can allow lesbians particular appearance freedoms, such as resisting the (gendered) dress codes of (hegemonic and heteronormative) heterosexual society, and taking pleasure in expressing their ‘real selves’ (Esterberg, 1990; Kaiser, 1998; Holliday, 1999; Ingebretsen, 1999; Myers et al., 1999; Entwistle, 2000; Schorb & Hammidi, 2000; Maltry & Tucker, 2002; Eves, 2004; Levitt & Hiestand, 2005; Clarke & Turner, 2007).

Through their shared visual identities lesbians are also able to ‘out themselves’, and therefore appearance norms act as a form of sexual signalling, both to reject the gaze of men, and attract the gaze of women (e.g., Rothblum, 1994a; Esterberg, 1996a; Krakauer & Rose, 2002; Rothblum, 2002; Luzzatto & Gvion, 2004; Winn & Nutt, 2001; Rifkin, 2002; Levitt & Hiestand, 2005). However, lesbian appearance can also be subtle, particularly when it is about not only what is worn, but also about how it is worn (Kaiser, 1998). Therefore, some appearance norms allow lesbians to identify each other (purportedly) ‘without being identifiable by the dominant culture’ (Rothblum, 1994a:92; see also, Lewis & Rolley, 1997; Winn & Nutt, 2001; Krakauer &

1In Chapter Two I discuss the specificities of particular lesbian looks in more detail.
Part One

Chapter One: Introducing appearance and visual identities

Rose, 2002; Clarke & Turner, 2007). Due to the function of appearance in enabling lesbians to find, and be found by, other lesbians (e.g., Stein, 1992; Rothblum, 1994a; Esterberg, 1996a; 1996b; Rudd, 1996; Holliday, 1999; Winn & Nutt, 2001; Krakauer & Rose, 2002), appearance norms have aided in the creation of coherent lesbian (and gay) communities (Rudd, 1996; Cole, 2000; Luzzatto & Gvion, 2004). These have historically been safe spaces, away from the gaze of voyeuristic or homophobic individuals, and appearance can indicate to others that lesbians (and gay men) ‘belong’ within these shared spaces (Rothblum, 1994a; Rudd, 1996; Entwistle, 2000; Ciasullo, 2001; Krakauer & Rose, 2002; Rothblum, 2002). It is within lesbian (and gay) space that appearance norms are most commonly situated (Rothblum, 1994a; Luzzatto & Gvion, 2004), and dressing appropriately becomes an inherent but mandatory requirement of belonging (Rothblum, 1994a; Myers et al., 1999; Cole, 2000; Schorb & Hammidi, 2000).

However, appearance can become a uniform or regime, whereby some lesbians may feel pressured to adhere to a particular ‘lesbian look’. If their look does not ‘fit’ then lesbians can struggle to feel that they belong, and may even have their authenticity questioned (Holliday, 1999; Ciasullo, 2001; Eves, 2004; Levitt & Hiestand, 2005; Clarke & Turner, 2007), for example, through unwanted comments, disapproving looks, or simply being ignored (e.g., Clarke & Turner, 2007). This can be constraining and frustrating for lesbians, and may mean that the appearance norms of lesbian culture are equally as restrictive as those of heterosexual society (Myers et al., 1999). Within lesbian communities, the rejection of feminine signifiers is often considered an important aspect of adhering to a particular (butch) lesbian aesthetic. This ‘privileging’ of masculine lesbian looks can serve to invalidate other (femme/inine) lesbian identities (Maltry & Tucker, 2002), because they may become overlooked and (mis)read as heterosexual, leaving these women feeling excluded (Maltry & Tucker, 2002; Taylor, 2007).

Furthermore, lesbian aesthetics have sometimes been interpreted as an issue of social class (e.g., Rothblum, 1994a; Taylor, 2007; 2008). One argument is that middle class lesbians are less likely to engage with butch aesthetics, and that working class lesbians are more likely to overtly convey their sexuality through their appearance (e.g., Rothblum, 1994a). However, research with working class lesbians has indicated that the contemporary (commercial) LGBT club ‘scene’ is a middle class ‘pretentious’ space,
within which working-class lesbians feel marginalised (Taylor, 2004; 2007; 2008). Scene space can be intimidating if women do not comply with its (middle-class) codes of dress and appearance, which may require the consumption (and associated capital) of the appropriate designer labels (e.g., Adidas, Bench, etc), to create a ‘legitimate’ appearance (Holliday, 1999; Clarke & Turner, 2007; Taylor, 2007; 2008), hence boundaries are created which exclude those who do not conform to the requirements of these spaces (Taylor, 2008).

However, when lesbians modify their appearance in order to ‘look the part’ (Clarke & Turner 2007), they may stand out from, and no longer fit in with, heterosexual mainstream society, of which they (often) remain a member. Therefore, it is plausible that heterosexual people will sometimes understand enough to ‘get the message’ about sexuality through lesbian (and gay) appearance (see, for example, Peel, 2001). Minimal research has assessed the ability of heterosexual people to read lesbian and gay men’s sexuality through appearance, possibly because lesbian (and gay) appearance primarily serves its purposes in the interests of lesbian and gay people (Smyth, 1998). What does exist is rather dated. However, experimental research in the late 1970s/1980s (discussed in more depth in Chapter Nine) found that ‘inappropriate’ displays of gender (which can reveal lesbian and gay identities) leads to dislike, negative evaluation (often as ‘unattractive’ and ‘deviant’), and stigmatisation. While in some studies (heterosexual) feminine women were evaluated as normal and agreeable, ‘masculine’ (e.g., butch), and lesbians were considered unappealing, unattractive, disagreeable and hostile (e.g., Nyber and Alston, 1977a; 1977b; Laner & Laner, 1980; Unger, Hilderbrand & Madar, 1982; Dew, 1985, see also, Rothblum, 1994a; Rudd, 1996). Therefore, lesbians who make clear their sexuality through how they dress and appear, risk rejection from wider mainstream culture. As a result visibility can become a vulnerability, because it can lead to societal disapproval (Krakauer & Rose, 2002), discrimination and hate crimes, and homophobic violence or attacks, which butch lesbians are more likely to be at risk of (e.g., Namaste, 1996a; Eves, 2004). Lesbians who can ‘pass’ as heterosexual in their look, may find it advantageous to do so (Rothblum, 1994a), but risk criticism from other lesbians for adhering to heterosexual norms, for ‘passing’ (as heterosexual), or for being ‘closeted’ (e.g., Walker, 1993; Winn & Nutt, 2001; Rothblum, 2002).
Bisexual visual identities

On the whole, bisexual people have been entirely ignored and overlooked within the literature on appearance. As a result, there is minimal theory about, or research into, bisexual appearance and visual identities, and therefore no understanding of how bisexual women experience appearance as part of their wider lived identities. Here I review the small body of appearance research, which has included bisexual people, all of which has been qualitative.

The only published study to focus specifically on bisexual women and their appearance is by U.S. psychologist Jennifer Taub (1999). Seventy-four U.S. bisexual women completed a qualitative survey\(^2\) about beauty and appearance. Some participants described having changed their appearance according to the gender of their current partner, a factor which does not exist for heterosexual or lesbian’s appearance (hence this provides an example of how bisexual women are distinct from lesbians or heterosexual women, and worthy of specific focus in research). Some of the bisexual women who were in relationships with men, dressed in a way they perceived as ‘heterosexual’ when with a man. They altered their appearance in order to ensure they maintained a ‘traditional’ version of femininity through removing body hair, and making an effort to be ‘pretty’ and ‘sexy’ because they ‘felt more pressure to conform to heterosexual beauty standards’ (Taub, 1999:32-33) than the bisexual women in relationships with women. However, one participant talked of looking more traditionally feminine when she was in a relationship with a butch lesbian. This finding suggests that bisexual women may change their visual aesthetic according to their current relationship. However, the picture was more complex than this. Other participants, also in relationships with men, had adopted (elements of) a ‘lesbian’ appearance, through short hair and ‘androgynous’ clothing, either to ‘prove’ their non-heterosexuality, or because they were less concerned with men’s assessment of their appearance. Some participants felt that their appearance was unaffected by the gender of their current partner, but had presented themselves as more androgynous or butch when they came out as bisexual in order to ‘fit in’ with a lesbian aesthetic. Taub’s (1999) findings indicate that bisexual women may look no different from heterosexual women, or may look similar to lesbians. Both locate bisexual women as lacking a distinct visual identity of their own, because their appearance is either

\(^2\) Some of the findings of this study relate to body size and are reported in Chapter Eight.
subsumed within lesbian appearance norms, or by heterosexual mainstream femininities.

Some research has included bisexual participants in wider LGBTQ appearance and identity studies. British sociologist Ruth Holliday asked queer participants to keep video diaries of how they managed and presented their identities in ‘work, domestic, and social spaces’ (Holliday, 1999:475). The one bisexual man who took part said that he wore bright colours, and resisted the rules of rigid heteronormative dictates around appearance by bending the rules of his employer’s dress codes. He suggested that within bisexual communities, men may have beards and wear tie dye clothes. There is no mention of women and their bisexual appearance, although Holliday (1999) highlighted that bisexuality is hard to express through visual means.

British psychologists, Victoria Clarke and Kevin Turner (2007) interviewed four gay men, three lesbians, and two bisexual women, and asked questions about sexuality and appearance. Participants’ descriptions of lesbians echoed the butch aesthetic described above, created through trousers and short, spiky haircuts. They also identified a multitude of specifically nuanced lesbian looks (e.g., the ‘old school’ ‘sporty’ and ‘biker dyke’ lesbians; Clarke and Turner, 2006:270). However, participants, including the two bisexual women, were unable to identify any appearance norms or codes that might be associated with bisexuality.

Most recently, U.S. psychologist Esther Rothblum (2010) conducted telephone interviews with sixty-four ‘sexual-minority’ women, in which she asked them about their understanding of butch and femme identities. Eleven self-identified bisexual women took part in this research, of whom, two identified as ‘femme’, one as ‘butch’, and the remaining eight as neither. The majority of the participants recognised appearance as part of butch and femme identities, reflecting the way in which appearance maps onto identity. As in Taub’s (1999) research, there was some suggestion that gender of partner was an influence on appearance. Although lesbian participants believed that bisexual women were femmes, the bisexual women considered themselves to be neither butch nor femme, or a little of both. This suggests

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3The self-labelled participants were mostly lesbians (34), although women who self-identified as bisexual (11) and queer (9) women also took part (one woman identified herself as queer-bisexual, and I have included her in both of these categories). The remainder identified as ‘two-spirit’ (2), (a Native-American term), trans (2), dyke (2), gay (2), and other/none (3).
that bisexual women may incorporate elements of both traditional heterosexual femininities, and of lesbian masculinised identities.

It would seem that more questions are raised than are answered through the small body of existing research. These studies demonstrate that some bisexual women have an awareness of butch, androgynous, and femme looking in relation to lesbian (and bisexual) identities, but they do not provide any one clear picture of bisexual visual identities. The findings offer no single conclusion regarding bisexual visual identity, unless to suggest that bisexual women have no distinct visual identity. Clarke and Turner (2007), highlight the necessity for research which specifically investigates bisexual looks and looking to consider whether bisexual norms exist and function in a similar way for bisexual people.

This research will be one of the first British investigations specifically focused on how bisexual women negotiate their appearance and visual identity. It is important to recruit non-community involved bisexual women, as well as participants who are actively involved in LGBT, and bisexual, communities (because, as highlighted above, it is often within shared space that appearance norms are most apparent). My research will make a unique contribution to the literature, and enable deeper understandings of how bisexual women manage their appearance in relation to their bisexuality and their lived realities.

Approaches and epistemologies

Feminist scholars (e.g., Stanley & Wise, 1990; Wilkinson, 2001), have argued that it is particularly important that the approaches and theories underlying research are made explicit, because these underpinning beliefs drive the types of questions asked, the methods used, and the analyses conducted, which in turn contribute to the knowledge gained. In this section I describe the approaches and epistemologies which underpin my research, and discuss the areas of psychology which my research contributes to.

A mixed-methods feminist approach

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4 At the time of writing British psychologist Helen Bowes-Catton is in the process of research exploring bisexual men and women's experience and performance of identity, mainly with members of British bisexual communities.
Feminist approaches to psychology are partly centred on the reclaiming, validating, legitimising and naming, of women's experience (Kitzinger & Wilkinson, 1997; Wilkinson, 1997; Kitzinger, 2004). Bisexual women and their identities and experiences are often overlooked, invalidated, marginalised and dismissed within psychology and in wider western culture (as discussed in depth through this thesis), hence the underpinnings of feminist approaches correspond well with my intention of exploring and representing bisexual women's voices about their experiences of (bisexual) appearance and lived (visual) identities.

A brief history of feminist approaches to psychology

Second wave feminist psychology originally emerged in the 1970s/1980s, as a resistance to 'male power and female oppression' (Kitzinger, 2001:273, also see, Kitzinger, 2004; Rutherford, 2007). There is no singular feminist approach, and there have been ongoing debates within the social sciences around what constitutes a feminist approach (e.g., Stanley & Wise, 1990; Reisinharz, 1992; Ramazanoğlu & Holland, 2002; Tolman & Szalacha, 2004; Hemmings, 2005; Torr, 2007). However, there are common themes across feminist psychology.

Feminist approaches often critique mainstream psychology as androcentric and sexist (Wilkinson, 1997; Kitzinger, 2004), hence the social sciences have been termed 'malestream' (e.g., Stanley & Wise, 1990). Feminist theorists draw attention to how sociology and psychology have traditionally been male professions, dominated by, and therefore reflective of, men's views and interests (e.g., Oakley, 1983/1990; Stanley & Wise, 1990; Stanley & Wise, 1993; Wilkinson, 1997; 2001; Hall, 2004). Research has often omitted women's experiences, and failed to focus on issues which relate specifically to them, and instead their presence has often been ignored (e.g., Stanley & Wise, 1993; Campbell & Schram, 1995; Wilkinson, 1997; 2001; Hall, 2004). Further, men are often the benchmark against which women are measured, which has led to differences between the sexes being interpreted as women's deficiencies (Tavris, 1993; Wilkinson, 2001). This thesis focuses primarily on (bisexual) women because I recognise that their experience is likely to be distinctly different from (bisexual) men's experiences (e.g., Stanley & Wise, 1990; Wilkinson, 1997; 2001; Hall, 2004), and a key element of my approach is to conduct primarily women centred research, which will
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give voice to bisexual women, and represent them and their experiences\(^5\) (e.g., Wilkinson, 1997; 2001).

Notions of truth and objectivity: Conceptual issues with the scientific model

Mainstream social sciences have traditionally been based on a quantitative traditional scientific model, which embraces the notion of an objective ‘truth’ which, it is claimed, can be established through a so-called value-free, neutral, objective and unbiased approach (Assiter, 2000; Hall, 2004; Clarke & Peel, 2005). However, those who have challenged objectivism more widely have argued that a single truth can never be fully verified:

‘Many philosophers have used the somewhat hackneyed example “All swans are white”. It was argued that an observer can never be sure that she or he has observed all the swans that there are and that could be discovered in the future’ (Assiter, 2000:330).

This wider critique of ‘truth’ exists both within and outside feminist approaches, and feminists have noted that ‘truth’ based scientific models link with ‘mainstream’ versions of psychology (Ramazanoğlu & Holland, 2002:44). Therefore one feminist argument has been that the notion of an objective and neutral approach is an entirely mythical one (Assiter, 2000). Feminist researchers have also argued that traditional quantitative research is limiting for participants, who are restrained by the data collection techniques, for example, closed questions, scales and measures.

Conclusions drawn are further limited by a loss of ‘the individual’ in statistical summaries, hence it has been suggested that quantitative research does not allow insightful or varied accounts of women’s experience (Wilkinson, 1997; 2001).

I engage with qualitative methods in order to gain a rich understanding of bisexual women’s experiences of their lived (visual) identities, which I hope will produce detailed and nuanced knowledge. Qualitative approaches are generally understood to generate individual and personal accounts which provide vivid and insightful pictures of women’s experiences (Stanley & Wise, 1990; Wilkinson, 2001; Hall, 2004).

\(^5\)However, I note that feminist approaches have moved beyond simply ‘research on women, by women, for women’ (e.g., Stanley & Wise, 1990; Stanley & Wise, 1993; Warren, 2002), for example, since the mid 1990s, feminist researchers have conducted studies of men’s as well as women’s lived experiences (e.g., Willott & Griffin, 1997; Courtenay, 2000; Frith & Gleeson, 2004; Dryden, Doherty & Nicolson, 2010).
some feminist theorists have argued that to dismiss the scientific model of psychology entirely, is to leave feminist research open to accusations of it as ‘unscientific, subjective, political and generally untrue’ (Ramazanoğlu & Holland, 2002:41). Therefore, it has been suggested that the ‘master’s house’ can be best dismantled by using the ‘master’s tools’ (e.g., Stanley & Wise, 1990; Unger, 1996; Rutherford, 2007). Data presented within a scientific framework is more likely to be ‘taken seriously’, be ‘respected’ and reach a wider range of academics, for example through more ‘prestigious’ journals. Therefore, quantitative research is useful to highlight women’s oppression, to persuade funding bodies and policy makers of the existence of a ‘problem’ worthy of investigation, and to aid in campaigning for social change (e.g., Wilkinson, 2001, Unger, 1996; Tolman & Szalacha, 2004). For these reasons I also engage with quantitative research.

Therefore, I chose to approach this research using a mixed methods feminist approach, which developed as the research evolved, in an endeavour to make the most of both qualitative and quantitative approaches (Tolman & Szalacha, 2004). These two paradigms have often been portrayed as opposing, due to their differing philosophical underpinnings, and I detail how I incorporated both qualitative and quantitative methodologies in Chapter Four.

Feminism and the oppression of ‘women’

Feminist approaches have traditionally been underpinned by an argument that all women are oppressed. However, more recently feminist researchers have recognised the importance of moving beyond conceptualisations of the term ‘woman’ as a single category, because to do so is to risk representing only the experiences of white, heterosexual, and middle-class women (Stanley & Wise, 1990; Kitzinger, 1996; Ramazanoğlu & Holland, 2002). The way in which oppression is experienced depends upon more than gender alone (Stanley & Wise, 1990; Kitzinger, 1996; Clarke & Peel, 2007b), and women’s sexuality is also a meaningful and important aspect of their lived experiences (Kitzinger, 1996; Tolman & Szalacha, 2004). Therefore, it could be argued that bisexual women experience oppression differently from either lesbians or heterosexual women, and it can be useful to research particular social identities in order to highlight the ways in which particular groups of people may have shared experiences. Therefore, researching bisexual women provides an opportunity to represent the ways in which they experience oppression as members of a stigmatised
group. However, some feminist scholars have drawn attention to the necessity of considering identity and oppression in terms of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1993; Fish, 2008). Intersectionality highlights how diverse identities and wider structural systems of oppression interact and inter-relate with each other. While bisexual women may have some similar shared experiences, they will also have different understandings of oppression, due to the complex interconnections between aspects of their personal identities (e.g., disabilities, religion, race, as well as gender and sexuality), and how these inter-relate with each other and with particular oppressive structural systems (e.g., sexism, heterosexism and racism) (Crenshaw, 1993; Fish, 2008).

Nonetheless, this research makes a valuable contribution by incorporating bisexual women’s experiences into feminist psychology, where they have been largely absent. Bisexuality has received minimal attention within recent feminist psychology, and a search of papers published in the journal *Feminism and Psychology*[^6], can be used to exemplify this. Out of the most recent 165 articles published in the journal[^7], only three papers contained the word ‘bisexual’ or ‘bisexuality’ in their title (Clarke & Turner, 2007; Lee & Crawford, 2007; Barker & Langdrige, 2008), and a further three in the keywords (Lasenzo, 2008; Billies, Johnson, Murungi & Pugh, 2009; Jowett & Peel, 2009). This equates to only a tiny percentage of papers which even consider bisexuality. Further, two of these publications were not specifically about bisexual experience, but instead included bisexuality as part of wider LGB, queer, or sexualities research. While some inclusion is preferable to complete exclusion, these findings illustrate the marginalisation of bisexuality within contemporary feminist psychology. This is particularly relevant because ‘the very invisibility of bisexual experience [...] is the basis for bisexual oppression’ (Baker, 1992:265). Therefore the overlooking of bisexuality within feminist literature contributes to the dismissal and marginalisation of bisexual people (e.g., Barker, 2007). Through its feminist focus specifically on bisexual women, this thesis allows bisexual women to have their voices heard, and become (slightly) more visible within the discipline of (feminist) psychology.

[^6]: Established in 1991, *Feminism and Psychology* is ‘the leading international forum’ for the publication of contemporary feminist research and debate within psychology (http://fap.sagepub.com).
[^7]: The search was conducted from January 2007 (the year in which I started this thesis) to November 2010.
The researcher/researched relationship

Feminist researchers often focus on the relationship between the researcher and the researched (e.g., Oakley, 1983/1990; Stanley & Wise, 1990, Unger, 1996; Warren, 2002). In traditional approaches the researcher holds a powerful hierarchical position, assumed to be the expert and the bearer of knowledge (e.g., Oakley, 1983/1990; Stanley & Wise, 1993), whereas those who are researched are subordinate ‘subjects’, who simply provide the researcher with data (Campbell & Schram, 1995). Feminist researchers are critical of these unequal power relations which, through their objectification of participants, reproduce the subordination of women (Stanley & Wise, 1993; Hollway & Jefferson, 2000; Warren, 2002). As a bisexual woman myself I am in a strong position to research bisexual women, because to some extent our shared identity can reduce the differences between researcher and researched. Feminist theorists have suggested that members of marginal groups ‘by virtue of their position and outlook on the world, are able to gain insights into knowledge that are invisible to those in a dominant position’ (Assiter, 2000:331). Bisexual women have been mis/underrepresented in mainstream psychological research and within wider western culture (as I discuss in some depth in Chapter Three and Six). I understand myself to be in a privileged position, which holds the potential for the pursuit of a deeper understanding of bisexual women’s experiences of their visual and wider identities. I conceive of the participants as experts of their own experience (Wilkinson, 2001), as a (feminist) bisexual woman myself, it is of utmost importance to me that my research has bisexual women’s interests at heart (see, for example, Reinhart, 1992; Stanley & Wise, 1990).

Lesbian and Gay (and LGBTQ) Psychology

My thesis also contributes to LGBTQ psychology. Just as feminist psychology emerged from the oppression of women, so lesbian and gay psychology emerged from the oppression of lesbians and gay men (Wilkinson, 2001; Clarke & Peel, 2005; 2007b). It has been argued that psychology as a discipline traditionally collaborated with this oppression (Wilkinson, 1998; 2000; Clarke & Peel, 2005), driven by the psychological model of homosexuality as sickness, which framed the majority of research between the turn of the century, through to the 1970s.
An important change, in 1973, was the removal of homosexuality from the American Psychiatric Association’s Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM), meaning that homosexuality per se was no longer classified as an illness (e.g., Kitzinger, Coyle, Wilkinson & Milton, 1998; Clarke & Peel, 2005). Shortly afterwards, in 1975, the American Psychological Association (APA) introduced official policy that homosexuality was not a sickness, and encouraged members of health professions to commit to removing the stigma around lesbians and gay men (Kitzinger et al., 1998).

It was amid these changes that affirmative lesbian and gay psychology began (Wilkinson, 2001), which has since been defined as ‘psychological theory and practice which is explicit about its relevance to lesbians and/or gay men, which does not assume homosexual pathology, and which seeks to counter heterosexist oppression’ (Kitzinger, 1999:51). By the mid 1980s, the APA had a formal division (Division 44: Society for the Psychological Study of Lesbian and Gay Issues), which was dedicated to affirmative lesbian and gay research (Kitzinger et al., 1998; Clarke & Peel, 2005). These changes contributed to lesbian and gay psychology becoming an established field within the wider psychology discipline (Kitzinger et al., 1998).

By the late 1990s, lesbian and gay psychology was considered ‘a burgeoning and diverse field’ (Peel, 1999:487), and it has become increasingly visible within psychology and public discourse (D’Augelli & Patterson, 1995). Knowledge on a range of topics has emerged from the field since its conception. During the late 1990s into the early 2000s, research on bisexuality (and trans and queer people) began to be included. Since the mid-2000s, lesbian and gay psychology has evolved into LGBTQ psychology. In this sense, research on bisexuality has its roots within the broader field of LGBTQ psychology. Research and theory has discussed concepts of lesbian, gay and bisexual identities, ethnicities and identities, lesbian and gay development and identities over the lifespan, personality and individual differences, LGBTQ health and illness, and drug and alcohol use, relationships, lesbian and gay parenting, discrimination, homophobia, and heteronormativity, among other topics (e.g., D’Augelli & Patterson, 1995; Kitzinger et al., 1998; Kitzinger, 1999, Clarke & Peel, 2007a).

However, although similar to feminist psychology in stemming from resistance and challenge to oppressive practice and research, lesbian and gay psychology has less commonly challenged mainstream methods. It has, until recently, subscribed mainly to a framework which embraces ‘quantification, positivism and essentialism’ (Clarke &
Peel, 2005:5; see also, Kitzinger, 1999). More recently debates have arisen, stemming from disagreement over essentialist versus constructionist understandings of sexuality, and have led to discussions of how best to conduct research in a way that instigates social and political change. Due to a lack of agreement ‘research now proceeds separately within each tradition’ (Clarke & Peel, 2005:6, see also, Kitzinger, 2001).

Some within (and outside) the psychology discipline still subscribe to the notion of homosexuality as pathology (c.f., Kitzinger et al., 1998; Kitzinger, 1999). This is perhaps most recently exemplified by psychiatry research (Bartlett, Smith & King, 2009), in which questionnaires were sent to mental health professionals, requesting their views on treatments to ‘change’ homosexuality. Although only 4% of these professionals reported willingness to attempt to change sexual orientation should a client request it, 17% ‘reported having assisted at least one client/patient to reduce or change his or her homosexual or lesbian feelings’ (Bartlett et al., 2009). However, the publication of this paper made headline news in the U.K. (e.g., Macrae, 2009; Sample, 2009), perhaps highlighting that lack of acceptance of lesbian and gay people is now considered newsworthy. This reflects the shift away from homosexuals as sick, towards homophobia as sickness (Kitzinger, 1987).

Despite the changes within the APA in the 1970s/1980s, it was not until the end of 1998 that the British Psychological Society (BPS) included a Lesbian and Gay Psychology Section (Peel, 1999; Kitzinger, 1999). However, establishing the section proved to be a challenge, (with advocates of it receiving hate mail from other BPS members), and it was only achieved after a decade of campaigning (Kitzinger, 1999; Clarke & Peel, 2005). To make lesbian and gay psychology visible within the discipline has been considered somewhat of a challenge (e.g., Kitzinger et al., 1998; Clarke & Peel, 2005; 2007b). However, what is notable is that the title of this section excluded bisexuality. In 2004, British psychologist Meg Barker discussed this:

‘This point has come up in our own discussions about name change in the Lesbian and Gay Section of the BPS. We do not want to spend all our time and energy deliberating over names and not actually doing anything to embrace bi people and encourage bi-related research. Conversely, some of us think that changing the name is an important part of showing our openness to bi people and research’ (Barker & Yockney, 2004:120).
The name of the section was changed in 2009, to the *Psychology of Sexualities Section*, a title which is aimed to be inclusive of all sexualities. While the new title does not preclude bisexuality, neither does it actively *include* it. Further, it is important that bisexuality is included not only in name, but also ‘in deed’, in order to overcome its marginalisation (Clarke & Peel, 2007b:21).

Bisexual psychology has had limited visibility under the homogenising umbrella of LGBTQ psychology, and has experienced a rather empty inclusivity (see, for example, Fish, 2008; Clarke & Rüdolfsdóttir, 2005; Clarke & Peel, 2007a; 2007b). For example, a perusal of the contents pages of a number of psychology ‘readers’ and textbooks provides a mixed picture. Some of these do not attempt to include bisexuality in their name, for example, *Lesbian and Gay Psychology: Theory, Research, and Clinical Applications (Psychological Perspectives on Lesbian & Gay Issues)* (Greene & Herek, 1994), and *Lesbian and Gay Psychology: New Perspectives* (Coyle & Kitzinger, 2002). Despite their titles, these books do actually include bisexual people in some of the content, but it would increase the visibility of bisexuality if it were to be included in the title of the book.

However, even titles which *do* include bisexuality tend to demonstrate only tokenistic inclusion. For example, in *Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Identities over the Lifespan: Psychological Perspectives* (D’Augelli & Patterson, 1995), just three of the fifteen chapters include ‘bisexual’ in the title (Fox, 1995; Savin-Williams, 1995; D’Augelli & Garnets, 1995), and two of these discuss bisexuality only as part of wider LGB identities. Similarly, in *Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Aging: Research and Clinical Perspectives* (Kimmel, Rose & David, 2006), of the fifteen chapters only one is specifically about bisexual people (Dworkin, 2006). This brief exploration of texts

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5 Similar issues arise in other psychology bodies in the western world. The Australian Psychological Society has a section which does not yet include bisexual in its name, titled *Gay and Lesbian Issues and Psychology* (http://www.psychology.org.au). In Canada the Canadian Psychological Association’s section for LGBTQ interest is titled *Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity* (http://www.cpa.ca), hence is similar to the BPS subsection in that it is both inclusive of, but does not explicitly name, bisexuality. When Division 44 of the APA was originally created in 1984 (Kitzinger, Coyle, Wilkinson & Milton, 1998), the title only included ‘lesbian’ and ‘gay’. It now includes both ‘bisexual’ (and ‘transgender’) in its title of *Society for the Psychological Study of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Issues* (http://www.apadivision44.org). However, even when the name is included, this does not guarantee inclusivity in its members, or its discussions and publications (see, for example, Clarke & Peel, 2007b).

6 Twelve of the chapters include bisexuality, either in the context of ‘lesbian and bisexual’ or ‘LGBT’, indicating that some inclusion of bisexual people is apparent. However, this inclusion remains rather empty, because bisexual experience is not understood to be distinct from wider LGBTQ identities.
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echoes the findings of Barker (2007), who identified that bisexuality was largely missing from psychology textbooks. It is important for psychologists to recognise that bisexual people’s experiences may differ from lesbian and gay men’s lived realities. In order for bisexuality to be understood and become validated, it would be useful to not only include bisexual people as part of wider collective LGBTQ theory and research, but to focus more often and more specifically on bisexual people’s experiences so that they can be meaningfully included within the contents and titles of these publications.

Similarly, journals in which LGBTQ and sexualities research and discussion is published contain precious few papers which are focused on bisexuality. In Sexualities none of the papers over the last 3 years included ‘bisexual’ in their title, and only one in the keywords, out of a total of 152 articles published\textsuperscript{10}. A similar picture emerged in The Journal of Homosexuality, where although there was more reference to bisexuality, it was predominantly as a part of studies or discussion of lesbian and/or gay men. In Chapter Three I discuss in some depth the reasons for, and implications of, the overlooking of bisexuality within the psychology discipline.

Social Constructionist Approaches

A debate between advocates of essentialist and social constructionist approaches to sexuality, has been apparent within lesbian and gay psychology (c.f., Epstein, 1987; Stein, 1990a; Stein, 1990b; Clarke, 2000; Kitzinger, 2001; Clarke & Peel, 2005). This debate is extremely relevant in order to unravel contemporary (and competing) understandings of what underpins sexual identities. While this thesis is primarily driven by a feminist approach, social constructionist research and approaches are also an influence.

Until the very end of the late 1980s, an essentialist concept of sexuality went relatively unquestioned, and dominated the realm of lesbian and gay psychology (Tiefer, 1990; Kitzinger, 1999). Essentialist beliefs are based within biological discourses, which it has been argued hold a privileged position within sexuality studies (Tiefer, 1990). Those with essentialist beliefs argue that an individual’s sexuality stems from an inner sense of self, or essential being (Stein, 1990a; Kitzinger, 1999; Hegarty, 2010). A lesbian, gay man, or bisexual person is understood to ‘discover’ their ‘core’ identity (or alternatively ‘repress’ it), which fits with the notion of ‘an underlying fundamental and

\textsuperscript{10}The same strategy was employed for these searches as for Feminism and Psychology, whereby the search was conducted from January 2007 to November 2010.
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relatively stable ‘essential’ sexuality (Kitzinger, 1999:60). In this sense sexuality is understood to be biologically determined, hence it is fixed and immutable, and because it cannot be changed, sexuality is not deemed to be a personal choice (e.g., Stein, 1990a; 1990b; Kitzinger, 1999; Hegarty, 2010).

Social constructionists challenge essentialist frameworks. Whereas essentialist approaches conceptualise sexuality as biologically based, social constructionists conceive of them as social constructs, hence sexual identities are understood to be historically and culturally created. Further, social constructionist scholars emphasise how the historical and cultural creation and maintenance of socially constructed categories (such as sexuality, gender, childhood, mental illness etc.) structure our understandings, because they can dictate how we conceive of ‘reality’ (e.g., Tiefer, 1990; Burr, 2003). These socially constructed categories change throughout history and across cultures (Tiefer, 1990) but often serve to marginalise, stigmatise, and oppress ‘minority’ categories (Kitzinger, 1999).

Essentialism has been the underpinning of many discourses which encourage the acceptance of lesbians and gay men (and bisexual and transgender people). If sexuality is understood to be biological, therefore immutable, then the argument goes that it is not the ‘fault’ of the LGBTQ person that they were ‘born’ as non-heterosexual. Therefore, it is argued that heterosexual people must be tolerant of LGBTQ people because they were ‘born that way’ (Kitzinger, 1999; Hegarty, 2010). However, social constructionists suggest that the essentialist view reiterates the ‘normality’ of heterosexuality, and maintains its privileged position. By arguing that sexuality is biological, the effect is that an apologetic discourse has emerged, whereby LGBTQ people ‘cannot help’ their sexual identity and are ‘victims’ of their genetic make-up. Social constructionist critiques of mainstream understandings suggest that deconstructing these categories allows the opportunity to highlight the stigmatising and pathologising effects of them (Kitzinger, 1999). Furthermore, social constructionism has been advocated as an effective method in challenging ‘anti-gay and heterosexual agendas’ (Clarke, 2000:157), and I hope to extend this to also confront ‘anti-bisexual’ agendas, and the way in which they operate.

What this thesis takes from social constructionist perspectives is the important influence of historical and cultural constructions of bisexuality. By exploring how bisexuality has been constructed as a social category throughout the history of science,
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psychology and western culture more widely, it is possible to achieve a deeper understanding of the category, and the experiences of people who identify with it. In this thesis I unpick how bisexuality, as a socially constructed category, is understood within contemporary society. It is hoped that drawing on social constructionist approaches will lend a great deal to understanding the underpinnings of the stigmatisation and marginalisation of bisexuality and bisexual people.

Rationale, Aims and Research Questions

Minimal previous research has focused specifically on how bisexual women manage their appearance, or understand their visual identities, or the implications thereof. The rationale for undertaking this thesis is to fill this distinct gap in the psychological literature, in particular to inform appearance research, and feminist and LGBTQ psychology. The overarching aim of this research is to focus specifically on bisexual women's identity and appearance, in order to provide an understanding of bisexual women's visual identities. The specific aims and research questions, outlined below, evolved and developed as the research progressed:

1. How is women’s bisexuality and women’s bisexual visual identity represented within the psychological literature and what are the implications of these understandings?
2. How do bisexual women manage their bodies and appearance in order to construct visual identities, specifically in relation to their bisexuality, and what does this reveal about bisexual identity more widely?

After exploring the bisexual literature within psychology (see, Chapter Three), I conducted interviews with twenty bisexual women, in order to explore their accounts of visual identity and appearance. I used face-to-face semi-structured qualitative in-depth interviews, which were thematically analysed (Hayes, 2000; Braun & Clarke, 2006) to identify the key themes in the women's accounts. The results revealed that bisexual women believed that a distinct bisexual visual identity was largely non-existent. However, they recognised and sometimes 'borrowed from' the appearance norms of lesbian visual identity. They also indicated that they believed that heterosexual women had extremely feminine appearance norms. Therefore, I wanted to empirically investigate the idea that lesbians, heterosexual women, and bisexual
women, may all have distinct ‘beauty’ and appearance practices. I developed a new research question and a quantitative questionnaire in order to answer it:

3. How do bisexual, lesbian, and heterosexual women manage their bodies and their appearance, and what additional insights can this offer into (bisexual) visual identities?

It was hoped that the findings would offer insights into the ways in which appearance relates to (bi)sexuality. Critically, this allowed some contextualisation of (the practices which contribute to the creation of) bisexual visual identities, in relation to the visual identities of other sexualities.

Finally, I was interested in heterosexual people’s understandings of (bi)sexuality and appearance. Whether heterosexual people recognise sexuality through appearance is a topic which has rarely been explored. I developed a qualitative survey to consider whether (mainly) heterosexual young people were able to recognise and describe lesbian, gay, bisexual and heterosexual appearance norms. The student’s answers about sexuality and appearance enabled me to consider (the recognition of) bisexual visual identity, in relation to other sexualities and their visual identities:

4. How do (primarily) heterosexual young people recognise appearance norms for bisexuality, lesbian sexuality, or heterosexuality, and what insight does this provide into bisexual visual identity and visual identities more widely?

As these questions reveal, this research is concerned primarily with an exploration of bisexual visual identity. However, the inclusion of lesbian and heterosexual women and their understandings of their own and others visual identities will contextualise bisexual women’s understandings of (bi)sexuality and appearance. These research questions and aims allow for an in depth exploration of bisexual visual identity.

**Thesis Overview**

I end this chapter with an overview of the content of this thesis which is in three parts. Part One includes this introduction, and the next two chapters, which provide a background to the research by drawing on existing literature. In Chapter Two I begin by exploring historical and contemporary understandings of lesbian and bisexual appearance, both through the academic social science literature and relevant cultural sources. I argue that there are inextricable links between appearance and sexuality. In
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Chapter Three I introduce the topic of bisexuality in some depth. This begins with a discussion of the negative conceptualisations of bisexuality within psychology. These are apparent within early sexology, second wave sexology, and elsewhere in more recent psychology and wider cultural sources. I also consider recent and (somewhat more) affirmative understandings of bisexual identities.

In Part Two, I discuss the methods and methodology undertaken in this thesis. Chapter Four is the main methods and methodology chapter, in which I discuss how qualitative and quantitative method/ologies were combined. I also discuss the concept of ‘insider-outsider’ research, and how my own bisexual identity was an important consideration when conducting research with bisexual women. This chapter also contains an outline of each of the methods (interviews, questionnaire, and surveys), and analysis, and how these tools of data collection were able to assist in meeting my aims. In Chapter Five I discuss the procedural aspects of conducting qualitative semi-structured interviews with bisexual women, and report the demographics of the women who took part.

In Part Three I report on the results of the mixed-methods research. In Chapters Six and Seven I report the thematic analysis of the data from interviews conducted with bisexual women. In Chapter Eight I detail the development and findings from the quantitative questionnaire conducted with bisexual, lesbian and heterosexual women. Chapter Nine reports on the conception of the qualitative survey and the results of thematic analysis with data gathered from (mainly) heterosexual students. In the final chapter of the thesis I bring together my research in a discussion of my findings and draw conclusions around the implications of this thesis.
Unravelling the links between sexuality and appearance

Introduction

In this chapter, I begin by drawing on popular cultural and contemporary sources in order to demonstrate that a distinct and visible lesbian look (or looks) can be evidenced, whereas in contrast there is a lack of any equivalent bisexual look. I then unravel the history of how visual identities have developed and been important for lesbians to show how appearance and sexuality have been intrinsically related within western culture over at least the last one-hundred and fifty years.

I document how the category of ‘lesbian’ emerged during the late nineteenth century, while in contrast, a specific bisexual identity, distinct from lesbian or heterosexual identity, does not appear to have truly developed until the 1970s. However, even since the category of bisexuality has widely existed, bisexuality has been excluded from the literature which makes reference to appearance. I draw upon the resources available to build a picture of the importance of appearance and sexuality, but to do so I have to focus on lesbians\textsuperscript{11}, due to the absence of bisexual specific literature (which in itself provides an example of how bisexuality has been overlooked within academia). The late emergence, and the subsequent exclusion of bisexuality have largely rendered it invisible, hence bisexuality can often exist only as an invisible part of a wider lesbian history.

In/Visible lesbians and Invisible bisexuals

Visibly lesbian

In this section I demonstrate that there are a range of visual images widely available within sources such as popular\textsuperscript{12} lesbian themed books, magazines, television programmes and websites, all of which make frequent reference to appearance.

\textsuperscript{11}At certain times lesbians and gay men have united in particular to fight injustice. The path of ‘lesbian’ and ‘gay men’s’ history has been similar in places, and parallels can be drawn between the two. Consequently at times gay men’s history has been heavily interwoven with lesbian history and where it is necessary, or proves useful, I utilise resources which discuss gay men to further demonstrate the key roles of appearance.

\textsuperscript{12}There are various ways to ascertain that these sources are ‘popular’ and therefore inspired by, and influential to, lesbians. Many of the websites referenced here have paid advertisers who have invested money in the site, and often there is the option of becoming a member of the site. In terms of magazines, Diva is a U.K. based lesbian magazine, which describes itself as ‘mainstream’. It has been in existence since 1994, and is Europe’s biggest selling lesbian magazine (www.divamag.co.uk).
Part One

Chapter Two: Unravelling the links between sexuality and appearance

Within them, there is often a humorous, light-hearted and accessible style, which indicates that although appearance is important, it is also pleasurable and fun. While this perhaps gives the impression that appearance is not to be taken too seriously, the depth and breadth of information they contain indicate that appearance is an integral part of the construction and maintenance of lesbian spaces and identities.

The word ‘gaydar’ dates from 1982, and is defined as an ability that homosexuals have to recognise other homosexuals, hence it refers to the practice of recognising or ‘spotting’ other lesbians and gay men through dress, gaze, and mannerisms (e.g., Gaydar, 2009). Gaydar is a commonly recognised term among lesbians and gay men (Woolery, 2007), and has even become recognised within published dictionaries (Collins English Dictionary, 2003/2004; Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary of Current English, 2005), where it is an informal noun created from a blend of ‘gay’ and ‘radar’. That the word has been absorbed into the English Language reflects the importance of the practice of recognising other homosexuals, and academic sources also make reference to the term: ‘Call it what you will, “gaydar”, recognition, or identification remains one of the most elusive, and therefore provocative, procedures of modern queer life’ (Villarejo, 2003:3, also see, Wollery, 2007).

The wealth of information available on how to recognise a lesbian provides an indication of the extent to which lesbian identities and lesbian appearance are understood as heavily interwoven (at least within the sources which I draw upon here). For example, the popular U.S. website www.lezgetreal.com lists ‘The Lez Get Real Top Ten: Ten Types of Lesbian’ (Phineas, 2008). Although this article is not titled ‘Ten Types of Lesbian Looks’, eight of the ten listed draw upon a butch or femme appearance in describing the ‘type’ of lesbian (e.g., dyke, lipstick lesbian, and so on. These ‘types’ are discussed further below).

The Internet is of particularly high value to LGBT people, because its anonymity allows the provision of a ‘safe space’ where members can be out about their sexuality within a welcoming, supportive and entertaining community (Heinz, Gu, Inuzuka & Zender, 2002). Accordingly, it has been reported that gay men and lesbians\(^\text{13}\) log on to and spend longer periods of time on the Internet than any other demographic group (Van Noort, 2000 in Heinz et al., 2002). As a result of this online community, LGBT websites are able to provide a rich source of contemporary cultural data about lesbian and gay

\(^{13}\) Bisexual people are omitted here as they are not mentioned in this source.
identities, including an array of visual images of lesbians. By drawing on a range of sites it becomes clear that ‘butch’ and ‘femme’ are the dominant images available on the Internet (see, for example, Phineas, 2008; lesbianworlds.com, 2001). The ‘butch’ is described as dressing in a masculine fashion, with short hair and a purposeful masculine stride (lesbianworlds.com, 2001). You can also access a step-by step guide of how to achieve (and/or recognise) this look, as outlined in an article entitled ‘How to Look Like a Butch Lesbian’ on the website www.ehow.com:

‘Things You’ll Need: Confidence, Lesbianism, [...] Men’s pants, Men’s boots/shoes, Men’s t-shirts/dress shirts

Step 1: Project assertiveness and confidence. These attitude traits run hand in hand with being butch lesbians.

Step 2: Dress the part. Shop in the men’s section of preferred stores. Wear boots, men’s jeans, sleeveless undershirt and ball cap as a casual way to dress butch. Some butch lesbians prefer the GQ [Gentleman’s Quarterly men’s magazine] butch look. A men’s suit, including tie, dress shoes and fedora will provide the professional lesbian satisfaction.

Step 3: Carry a wallet or money clip. Do not under any circumstance carry a purse [handbag]. If you must carry a bag, get a back-pack. [...] 

Step 4: Stride through the world purposefully. Do not swish the hips when walking. Carry your head high, do not look at your feet while walking’ (Finley, 2008).

Butch and femme remain the primary appearance theme within lesbian themed books too, for example similar definitions of ‘types’ of lesbians can be found in the book, So You Want to be a Lesbian? (Tracey & Pokorny, 1996). ‘Lesbian hair’ also features in these sources, acknowledged as a useful lesbian identifier, as shown in this article extract from the website www.lesblicious.co.uk:

‘You may think you’ve got the most finely tuned gaydar out there, but you can’t deny that your little antenna starts wagging and beeping all the more excitedly when the lady you’ve spied has a short hairdo... [...] Long-haired lesbians are usually assumed straight until proven otherwise. It may seem like the easy route to take, but often these women have to deal with a lot more than you might
expect. They face animosity across the board from people who fail to accept
them because they don’t fit the stereotype. [...] 

It’s important to make clear what I mean by lesbian hair. It’s not just short hair.
No, it’s short hair which says “I am SO gay right now”. It has spikes, it has streaks
of colour, it has a side sweep fringe, or it’s seconds away from baldness.
Sometimes it can be a heady blend of all these elements at once. It is a sign to the
world that your sexuality is questionable’ (Bosworth, 2008).

In her Internet article, Bosworth (2008), identifies that ‘lesbian hair’ is an intrinsic part
of (a particular type of) lesbian identity. ‘Lesbian hair styles’ are a liberating way of
making clear that as a lesbian, you are not invested in adhering to ‘conventional’
gender norms, nor in appealing to men in your appearance. She suggests that to not
adhere to a hairstyle ‘norm’ could result in animosity from other lesbians in their
communities, and highlights how ‘lesbian hair’ can be an aid in ‘coming out’. Hair even
features as the title of one book, The History of Lesbian Hair (Dugger, 1996), which
takes a light hearted approach to a discussion of queer lifestyles (not just hair), and
best selling lesbian magazine Diva includes articles such as Celestial Hair which claim
that your hair cut will reveal what year you ‘came out’ (Nix, 1997), indicating that
lesbian looks are constantly evolving.

Like the Internet (and primarily on the Internet) images of lesbian and gay film and TV
characters, and the actors and actresses who play them (as well as lesbian and gay
‘personalities’) have a strong cultural value for an LGBT audience:

‘actors, reviews of films, movies, television shows, books, and CDs are common
[features of online LGBT discussions]. Discussion threads often focus on
portrayals of GLBT [gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender] characters on
television or the big screen. Polls and quizzes often tie to current shows’ (Heinz et
al., 2002:112).

Photographs of ‘celebrity’ lesbians reveal that many lesbians in the public eye conform
to cultural expectations of lesbian appearance. British DJ Samantha Ronson
(see, Figure2.1) and Canadian singer-songwriter k.d. lang (see, Figure 2.2) exemplify
the butch look, and both made it into a list of 100 top butches in 2009\footnote{Sexsmith, who describes herself as a ‘queer butch’, initially compiled the list herself, then asked for further nominations and feedback from personal contacts, the U.S. website ‘www.sugarbutch.net’ and social networking site ‘Twitter’. She then created a panel of judges, which included one British woman and a mixture of butch and femme identified U.S. women.} (Sexsmith, 2009):
There are also variations on the butch theme, such as the ‘sporty’ dyke who dresses in a masculine but athletic look in baseball caps and jeans (Belge, 2009a), perhaps illustrated by (the somewhat limited number of) out lesbians who are professional athletes such as Czechoslovakian tennis player Martina Navratilova (born 1956).

Some nuanced butch visual identities extend beyond communicating sexuality and (allegedly) make knowable specific sexual preferences and practices. Perhaps the clearest Internet example of this is the ‘stone’ butch who is strongly masculine and dominant in sex and prefers not to be (or is unable to be) sexually touched herself (Drinkwater, 2003; Belge, 2009b). The term ‘stone butch’ is also evident in popular lesbian literature, perhaps most notably in ‘Stone Butch Blues’15 (Feinberg, 1993/2003). The book, set in the 1950s, is the story of Jess, a young stone butch growing up in the U.S. She prefers to dress in masculine clothes from an early age through to her teens (and adulthood), despite her parent’s disapproval:

‘I stripped down to my cotton panties and slid on his [her father’s] shirt. It was so starched [I] could hardly get the collar buttoned. I pulled a tie down from the rack […] I put on the suit coat and looked in the mirror’ (Feinberg, 1993/2003:20).

As Jess becomes older, we are given insight into the world of the stone butch. This extract begins with a stone butch friend of Jess’s telling her the reason that her relationship ended:

‘I just couldn’t let her [ex-girlfriend] touch me. We never talked about it. I don’t even know how to talk about it. At first it was ok with her, she understood. But later she told me she prided herself on always having been able to seduce her stone lovers. That scared the shit out of me, you know?’ (Feinberg, 1993/2003:94).

We then witness Jess’s reaction:

‘I was thinking how nice that would be to have a femme lover who cared enough to try […] Deep down, my insides seethed. I knew I was stone, too. It was a home alarm system that didn’t seem to have an on-off switch. Once installed, the sirens

15Stone Butch Blues can be described as popular and ‘credible’ because it won the American Library Association Gay and Lesbian book award, the Lambada Literary Award and the 1994 Stonewall Book Award.
went off and the gates shut, even if the intruder was loving’ (Feinberg, 1993/2003:94).

Another example of the importance of appearance can be found in the U.S. lesbian-themed novel *Rubyfruit Jungle*\(^\text{16}\) by feminist author Rita Mae Brown\(^\text{17}\) (1973/1977). The book is set in the U.S. in the 1950s/1960s, and tells a ‘coming of age’ story about lesbian Molly Bolt. It contains numerous passing references to how lesbians might look, the first of which is in Molly’s description of how she dresses differently to her (heterosexual) childhood friend:

‘Cheryl wore a dress, even when she didn’t have to. I hated her for that, plus she was always sucking up to the adults. Carrie [Molly’s adoptive mother] loved her [Cheryl] and said she looked exactly like Shirley Temple and why didn’t I look like that instead of roaming around the field in torn pants and dirty teeshirts’ (Brown, 1973/1977:30).

Molly has her first sexual relationship during high school, then, during her college education, she engages in a sexual relationship with a friend named Carolyn. When another mutual friend, Connie, discovers their relationship she suggests that if others found out then ‘everybody would call you queer, which you are I suppose’ (p.106). Carolyn is appalled at this suggestion:

“Connie!” Carolyn shrieked. “We are not queer. How can you say that? I’m very feminine, how can you call me queer? Maybe Molly, after all she plays tennis and can throw a football […] but not me”’ (Brown, 1973/1977:106).

Connie is confused by this response and asks the relevance of Molly’s tennis, to which Carolyn responds, ‘“You know, lesbians are boyish and athletic”’ (p.106). These quotations show the way in which both femininity (which is understood to include dress and appearance) and behaviour are considered relevant to sexuality. Later, Molly moves to New York, and visits a gay bar where she discovers the existence of butch and femme looks and roles when she meets the character Mighty Mo. Molly asks the (gay male) friend that she is with to explain butch-femme to her, to which he replies: ‘“A lot of these chicks divide up into butch and femme, male-female. Some people don’t, but this bar is heavy into roles”’ (p.147), demonstrating once again the

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\(^\text{16}\)The term ‘rubyfruit jungle’ is revealed in the book to be a slang term for women’s genitalia.

\(^\text{17}\)Brown has commented in recent years that ‘I don’t believe in straight or gay. I really don’t. I think we’re all degrees of bisexual’ (quoted in Sachs, 2008).
link between appearance and sexual preference and practice. In this final quotation from the book, Molly is discussing her job as a secretary:

‘I roared into the office in complete female rig – skirt, stockings, slip. I couldn’t cross my legs because some of the more obvious sperm producers would try to look up my leg, couldn’t put my feet on the desk because that wasn’t ladylike, and if I didn’t wear make-up everyone, including the boss, would ask me if I was “under the weather” that day’ (Brown, 1973/1977:182).

This demonstrates that Molly’s appearance does not fit the cultural expectations of femininity within the heterosexual workplace, and stands out from ‘the norm’. This is confirmed later in the book, when Molly visits her first lover, who says ““you must have stayed that way [lesbian]. Is that why you’re walking around in jeans and a pullover?”” (p.219), indicating that it was not usual for women to dress and appear in the way that Molly did.

Lesbian fiction associates appearance, identity, and behaviour, and we can begin to see that there are numerous types of lesbian identities which interlink identity, appearance, and behaviour. On the Internet these include the ‘baby’ butch or ‘baby dyke’ who is the young and boyish lesbian, whose appearance portrays her inexperience in sex, the ‘tomboi’ who is a sexually submissive butch (e.g., Phineas, 2008), and the ‘chapstick lesbian’ (a play on the term lipstick lesbian, see below) who is androgynous rather than markedly butch or femme. She is the lesbian who is a bit butch, but not very butch (e.g., Phineas, 2008; Belge, 2009c), and is said to have become popularised through the U.S. television character ‘Ellen’ (Belge, 2009c).

Femme lesbians on the other hand are portrayed as dressing and behaving femininely, more comfortable in dresses and make-up and often mistaken as heterosexual (e.g., Phineas, 2008; lesbianworlds.com, 2001). Again, there are variations of femme (although less than butch variations). There’s the ‘lipstick lesbian’ who dresses femininely and loves clothes, shoes and make-up (Belge, 2009d), and the ‘blue jean’ femme who identifies herself as femme but dresses in jeans and casual clothing (Belge, 2009e). Once again some of these femme ‘types’ tie in with sexual preference such as the ‘stone femme’ who (usually paired with a stone butch) is the receiver of sexual pleasure and does not wish to touch her partner’s genitals (e.g., Phineas, 2008; Bertrande, 2009).
According to these popular cultural sources, if a lesbian doesn’t fall into either the butch or femme categories, then she could be a mix of the two. These include the ‘futch’, the lesbian who is both butch and femme, (e.g., Belge, 2009f; Phineas, 2008), and the ‘soft’ butch, defined as androgynous on the outside but feminine (or ‘soft’) on the inside (e.g., Belge, 2009g), perhaps exemplified by the character Shane (see, Figure 2.3) in the influential U.S. lesbian TV show The L Word although others might describe her as ‘baby butch’18 (see, for example, Sedgwick, 2008):

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**Figure 2.3.** Image of the character Shane, from the U.S. TV show, The L Word played by Katherine Moennig.

*The L Word* was the first television drama specifically focused on lesbian culture and community (Sedgwick, 2008; Farr & Degroult, 2008). Its production team included some lesbians (Sedgwick, 2008), hence it was by lesbians, about lesbians, for lesbians, but also aimed at a mainstream market19. The programme provides another example of the importance of appearance within the realm of lesbian culture, evidenced by the

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18 This highlights how having so many variations of the butch and femme types can make it hard to identify which specific sub-type someone may fit into.

19 *The L Word* was primarily aimed at a lesbian audience, but was also aimed to appeal to heterosexual viewers in order to gain audience numbers. Farr and Degroult (2008), state that the result of this mixed audience was ‘unique representations of body and sexuality’ (Farr & Degroult, 2008:424). It has been highlighted that (in order to appeal to a mainstream audience) the lesbian characters in *The L Word* are, in the main, feminine in how they look, dress, and behave (Chambers, 2006; Farr & Degroult, 2008), hence butch characters are mainly only peripheral within the show (Farr & Degroult, 2008). This ties in with notions of the unacceptableness of butch identities, which is discussed later in this chapter.
academic attention the show has received. Literary, media studies, and philosophy scholars have written about aspects of lesbian appearance in academic journals such as The Journal of Lesbian Studies (Farr & Degroult, 2008), and in Reading the L. Word: Outing Contemporary Television (Akass & McCabe, 2008), in which academic contributors provide chapters which analyse appearance within the programme (Bundy, 2008; Heller, 2008; Moore & Schilt, 2008; Sedgwick, 2008; Wolfe & Roripaugh, 2008).

Butch and femme are often understood to be a ‘partnership’, complementary to each other. In Stone Butch Blues there are many references to the appearance and behaviour of butch and femme lesbians, and how they are paired with each other, such as in this excerpt when Jess first visits a lesbian bar

'What I saw there [was ...] strong, burly women, wearing ties and suit coats. Their hair was slicked back [and ...] they were the handsomest [butch] women I’d ever seen. Some of them were wrapped in slow motion dances with women in tight dresses and high heels [femmes]' (Feinberg, 1993/2003:28).

When butch and femme are presented together they contrast with each other, more heavily emphasising both. Again, current celebrity lesbian couples can be useful to demonstrate this, and Figure 2.4 shows U.S. actress Ellen DeGeneres (known for her role in the U.S. sitcom Ellen, and most recently for her chat show The Ellen DeGeneres show) as ‘(soft) butch’ and her ‘wife’, Australian actress Portia DeRossi (most recognised for her role in the U.S. TV series Ally McBeal) as femme. They reflect a contemporary (celebrity) version of the ‘traditional’ concept of the pairing of ‘butch’ and ‘femme’, the history of which is discussed in more depth later in the chapter.
Figure 2.4. Partners Portia de Rossi (left) and Ellen DeGeneres (right)

These various contemporary sources serve to demonstrate that there are clear images available of particular lesbian 'looks', and even if lesbians choose not to adhere to appearance norms, they are still able to recognise those lesbians that do. These looks extend beyond the fun voyeurism that these sources often imply, but can convey messages about the (alleged) behaviour of particular lesbians, and clue lesbians into finding each other, which links back to the functions of dress and appearance discussed in Chapter One. These plentiful images of 'lesbian looking' can also be used to highlight how in comparison there is a distinct lack of bisexual looks or ways of looking.

(in)visibly bisexual

In stark contrast to the possibilities of 'looking lesbian', a bisexual look is far less easy to identify within these sources which at first glance do not give any insight into bisexual appearance. Whereas a range of lesbian looks are commonly mentioned, any bisexual look rarely is. Lesbian looks exist, and are discussed as though taken-for-granted. In contrast, whether a bisexual look existed or not was sometimes explicitly discussed for example, in this thread on an Internet forum. It is titled *Is There a
Stereotypical Lesbian Look? and after some discussion on the titled topic, the subject is changed to that of bisexuality:

'[First forum user]: So, is there a stereotypical bi look?

[Second user]: I don't (sic) think so [...]’

[Third user]: Stereotypical "bi" look... well, I have a t-shirt that says "BI PRIDE" in big white letters with a gigantic rainbow triangle. Is that stereotypical enough? I love how clothing companies are now accepting the bi thing along with the gay/lesbian thing. I can find pins [badges20] now that say "I Kiss Boys AND Girls" instead of just having to play into the lesbian faction. I love it! Although, it does make one think. Bisexual people are always expected to be either mostly straight or mostly gay. What about those of us in the middle? Is there even a stereotype for that? Bi girls are either stereotypically slutty or stereotypically dykes who suck cock occasionally. I apologize for my crude language, but this is all terminology that I have heard used to describe us before’ (www.shybi.com21).

This bisexual woman mentions the rainbow flag (see, Figure 2.5) and links it with her bisexuality. The rainbow flag was established in the 1970s as a symbol of lesbian and gay pride, diversity and community, with each colour holding its own meaning22, and it has become a well-established (Anderson, 1993), and arguably heavily commercialised, symbol of lesbian and gay communities. Her reference to it suggests that she is unaware that there is also a specific bisexual flag (see, Figure 2.6), which has existed since 1998. It was developed by a bisexual man, Michael Page, specifically to increase the visibility of bisexual people (indicating in itself that visibility is an important issue). Similarly to the rainbow flag, each colour of the bisexual flag has a

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20Perhaps this forum member’s ‘pins’ (or badges) were sourced from Jennifer Moore’s website www.uncharted-worlds.org; these badges are often for sale at bisexual community events, and are discussed in depth in Chapter Six
21This internet forum was publicly visible on the Internet, and usernames (similar to pseudonyms) were in use. However, to ensure the anonymity of those people their usernames have been removed.
22The rainbow and rainbow flag is a symbol shared LGBT people, however many bisexual people feel no connection with the rainbow flag (Page, n.d.).
23Red for life, orange for healing, yellow for the sun, green for nature, blue for art and indigo/violet for harmony/spirit. The flag originally also contained pink, representing sexuality but this was removed as the colour was not commercially available when the flag was first produced (Anderson, 1993).
meaning²⁴ (Page, n.d.). However, it would seem to be a far less recognized symbol (of bisexuality) than the rainbow flag is (of homosexuality).

*Figure 2.5. The rainbow flag*

*Figure 2.6. The bisexual flag*

The bisexual forum user also mentions clothing companies embracing bisexuality. Certainly it is possible (primarily through the Internet) to buy t-shirts declaring your bisexuality (www.cafepress.com), with slogans such as *Love Knows No Gender, Bi, I Like Girls (And Boys)*, a picture of the bisexual flag, or for example those images listed in *Figures 2.7 and 2.8*. However, bisexual merchandise is harder to find and less abundant than lesbian equivalents.

²⁴Pink represents sexual attraction to the same sex, blue to the opposite sex, and the overlapping purple represents attraction to both sexes (Page, n.d.). Purple has also become represented as the colour of bisexuality (Szymanski, 2009).
It would seem that bisexual women are reliant on explicit ‘stamps’ of sexuality (badges and statements on t-shirts) should they wish to express their bisexuality through their appearance.

There are some women in the media both historically (e.g., German-U.S. actress/singer Marlene Dietrich), and currently (e.g., U.S. actresses Angelina Jolie and Drew Barrymore, U.S. folk singer Ani DiFranco), who have identified themselves as bisexual (Belge, 2009h). Their images give few clues as to what a bisexual woman might ‘typically’ look like, unless to suggest that they may be somewhat ‘feminine’ in appearance. However, it has been suggested that Marlene Dietrich (see, Figure 2.9) looked androgynous, and dressed to appeal to both men and women (Belge, 2009i). Ani DiFranco has changed her appearance often, at times looking extremely feminine.
through her long hair and jewellery, and at other times shaving her head and wearing ties. In recent photos (see, Figure 2.10) she too could be argued to be androgynous in how she appears.

\[\text{Figure 2.9. Actress and singer, Marlene Dietrich}\]

\[\text{Figure 2.10. Folk-singer Ani DiFranco}\]
Through these images, there is a potential link between bisexuality and androgyne, or between bisexuality and ‘femme/inine’ appearance, which perhaps echo the butch and femme of lesbian appearance. There are numerous images and descriptions of lesbian appearances, and an abundance of sources which link appearance and lesbian sexuality. However, links between bisexuality and appearance are dramatically less apparent when exploring contemporary sources. What is available requires far more analysis to make any (tentative) links between bisexuality and appearance apparent. This indicates that bisexual women do not have distinctive shared appearance norms, which may mean that they are less able than (butch) lesbians to express their sexuality, to be read and understood by others, or to create and maintain communities.

**Tracing the links between appearance and sexuality**

The discussion now moves to tracing the historical roots of how, and why, a recognisable lesbian appearance has come to be an intrinsic part of particular lesbian identities, communities, and subcultures. Here, I build a history of lesbian appearance and unpick the finer points of why ‘lesbian looks’ came about, which explores the purposes appearance has served. I also consider the debates that have arisen around appearance and visibility for lesbians. Bisexuality is largely invisible within this discussion because there has been no development of specific appearance norms for bisexual people.

**Tracing a pre-war history of sexuality and appearance**

**The history of the invisible woman and the invisible lesbian**

To trace the history of women has often proved a challenging task, due to the reliance on written records to build a picture of the past. This chapter focuses on the last one hundred and fifty years, as this is the point at which the links between appearance and sexuality can begin to be traced through academic sources. Even building a picture from the mid 1800s onwards is impeded by the minimal sources of information which are available. Women were often illiterate due to their limited access to education, therefore written documentation tended to be the realm of men. Men had little interest in writing about women because ‘the types of activities that were judged “worthy” of recording, such as politics, have usually been the province of men, so historic records of women’s lives can be scarce indeed’ (Jennings, 1994:73).
Tracing a history of *lesbians* has proved an even more difficult undertaking, because historically sexuality (let alone same-sex sexuality) was a topic considered inappropriate to document by the male-dominated culture of the 1800s. Women’s lives and sexual lives would not have been as much of interest to men as their own (Adams, 1988; Jennings, 1994). Women were often deemed asexual, especially without the presence of a man and women’s sexuality was viewed as secondary to men’s (Jennings, 1994). Furthermore the naming of men’s and women’s same-sex behaviour as ‘gay’ or ‘lesbian’ has not always existed in the way that it is understood today. It was not until the work of sexologists during the late 1800s, that the category of ‘lesbian’ came into existence. Therefore it is not easy to ‘look for lesbians’ in the historical period preceding the more formally documented period of psychology and sexology as they would not have been named as such.

Whereas male homosexual behaviour was persecuted, women were generally ignored and overlooked, not only by medical and political establishments (Adams, 1988), but also by the law (Faderman, 1978; Adams, 1988). Therefore same-sex acts between women have not been subject to the same oppressive legislative systems as same-sex acts between men (Heger, 1972/1997), which has resulted in lesbians being largely absent from written legal documents. It is for these reasons that the history of women’s same-sex sexuality is so scarce. Same-sex desire has been suppressed, denied, controlled and muted, and therefore:

‘We must first decode female sexual desire, and then within it, find same-sex desire. By necessity we need to be sensitive to nuance, masks, secrecy, and the unspoken [...] [l]esbian history will remain a history of discontinuities: we rarely know what women in the past did with each other in bed and out, and we are not able to reconstruct fully how and under what circumstances lesbian communities evolved [...] [therefore] we must accept a fragmentary and confusing history’ (Vicinus, 1992:469-470).

Consequently, when writing of appearance and visibility during this time, it is important to acknowledge that there is limited knowledge.

As middle class women began to gain greater access to education, so they began to keep records of their own lives. However, because sexuality was a taboo topic there was a ‘risk’ involved should these documents be found (Jennings, 1994; Faderman,
1991). Nonetheless certain letters (Faderman, 1991), and diaries exist from the mid 1800s, as well as fiction and non-fiction (Faderman, 1991; Moore, 1992), which provide insight into women’s same-sex sexuality. Furthermore, women who chose to live their lives independently of men often came to the attention of educated men as ‘rule breakers’ in their lifestyles: their masculine dress visibilised them, and they were therefore written about accordingly (Jennings, 1994), albeit from a very particular male perspective. I will now discuss how these women came to dress in a masculine style, and how women’s same-sex sexuality came to be associated with masculine appearance.

*The (invisible) romantic friendship*

Historians of women’s same-sex sexuality have discussed the notion of ‘romantic friendships’ between middle class women. Faderman (1991, 1981/1997), has presented an image of these friendships during the mid to late 1800s as not only accepted, but positively encouraged. However, certain restrictions would have been placed on them (Faderman, 1991). These romantic relationships may have developed while one or both of the women was married to a man (Faderman, 1978), or preceded any relationship with a man. Either way, women were encouraged not to consider these ‘romantic friendships’ as permanent because they were not to take priority over an actual or potential heterosexual relationship (Faderman, 1991). Any erotic element to the relationship must not be spoken of as they were seen as ‘innocent’. For those women not yet involved with a man, romantic relationships were sometimes viewed as a rehearsal before the taken-for-granted ‘main event’ of marriage (that would be expected to inevitably follow) (Faderman, 1991; 1981/1997). As well as the cultural expectation of marriage these relationships would have been limited in their permanence by practical factors. Women would not have had economic independence in order to support the continuance of a same-sex ‘romantic friendship’ (Faderman, 1991), because middle class women were not expected to work.

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25 Much of the writing on this topic has been provided by U.S. scholars. However, their work (e.g., Newton, 1991), makes apparent the influence of the British sexologists and psychologists and indicates a broadly similar cultural picture within the U.K. and the U.S.

26 It has been debated whether sexual activity would have entered into romantic friendships (Faderman, 1991; Moore, 1992; Newton, 1991). However Jeffreys (1985; 1989/1993a), has argued that women’s right ‘to exist outside sexual relationships with men’ (1985:100), and a recognition of a history of lesbianism (1989/1993a), is more important than whether these relationships included sex.
Part One  Chapter Two: Unravelling the links between sexuality and appearance

Romantic friendships between women pre-empt notions of ‘lesbian identities’ which came to be created in part by psychology and medicine later (see below). Therefore it is not necessarily ‘accurate’ to refer to women who engaged in relationships with other women as ‘lesbians’. It is unlikely that they would have had the concepts, or language, to consider themselves as having a specific identity (Newton, 1991). Equally, although it may seem that women in ‘romantic relationships’ could be described as bisexual (as they were engaging in emotional and possibly sexual relationships with both men and women) neither can they be labelled as such.

Whether these friendships were ‘pure’ or ‘(homo)sexual’ in character (Moore, 1992; Newton, 1991), is unclear, but either way they were still considered to have posed less of a threat to the social order than male homosexual relationships (Terry, 1999). This trivialisation would have offered a certain safety to these women, as the common understanding is that there were no ill-effects or ‘dangers’ associated with romantic friendship – at least, not until the work of early sexologists in the late 1800s27 (Jeffreys, 1983; Faderman, 1991). In sum, the picture is that romantic relationships were understood as innocent, asexual, and temporary, and therefore dismissed as unimportant. There is no evidence to suggest that the appearance of women in such relationships differed from that of any other women, which implies that they are unlikely to have stood out in any way.

From the 1830s onwards, the notion of women adopting a masculine appearance first materialised, linked with the emergence of new women’s colleges in American cities. Colleges enabled (certain privileged liberal and middle class women) to become enrolled in higher education (Faderman, 1978; 1991). However, this was met with resistance by conservative men who considered women’s education an influence that would masculinise women and threaten traditional gender roles, which were considered critical for society to function (Faderman, 1978). Despite this, the spread of colleges continued and by the late 1800s even a few universities began to tentatively allow women. Colleges brought women together and enabled new romantic relationships between women to develop as more women met each other. Colleges

27Diggs (1995), has argued that relationships between women were pathologised before the emergence of sexology: ‘I am not suggesting that women’s relationships were universally discouraged, but I am insisting that the representation of what we might now call homoerotic or lesbian relations were less monolithic than recent literary and social histories have implied – and that the tidy division between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries misrepresents the varieties of representation and, most importantly, resistance occurring in the United States throughout the nineteenth century’ (p.320).
also provided the physical and psychological sites for the emergence of feminist collectives, whereby women began to demand more rights to education and freedom from the constraints of their gendered roles. As the feminist movement grew, so did the association between feminism and sexual inversion. Women’s colleges and education were associated with becoming masculine, and as places where both ‘lesbian’ and ‘feminist’ communities and collectives developed and existed (e.g., Faderman, 1991), hence ‘lesbian’ and ‘feminist’ became linked due to their common roots.

Once educated, women needed to infiltrate a heavily masculine and hostile work environment in order establish a career. Women who entered into a profession may have ‘often felt themselves forced into dress and behavior that was also characterized as masculine’ (Faderman, 1991:21). Consequently many early professional women would have managed their appearance and worn men’s suits, shirts and waistcoats with the purpose of getting in and fitting into male dominated workplaces (Faderman, 1991). This played a key part in their being able to earn their own living, women could ‘go to college, educate themselves for a profession, earn a living in a rewarding career, and spend their lives with the women they loved’ (Faderman, 1991:12).

Without the equivalent opportunities of education afforded to middle class women, working class women’s options were limited. Domestic or factory work were the only jobs open to them, and in these professions women were paid less well to do similarly skilled jobs done by men. While many women accepted their circumstance, others resisted the restrictions that ‘being a woman’ placed upon them. They chose to move to areas where they were not known and ‘passed’ as men. They adopted short hairstyles and dressed as men did, which allowed them to earn more by working in ‘men’s jobs’. They therefore gained more economic and social independence. Although not all of them were necessarily attracted to, nor involved with women, some certainly were, and to dress in a masculine style and pass as men was a way that same-sex relationships could exist, free from the need of financial support from a man (Faderman, 1991; Newton, 1991). As Bingham (1998), suggests, ‘the assumption of masculinity was indisputably a feminist gesture, a symbol of claiming male privilege’ (p.36). It is possible that it was these women who provided the underpinning of theories of ‘inverts’ by the sexologists of this time (Newton, 1991).
These women who dressed in a masculine way exemplify the function of appearance in allowing women to break down barriers and become employed within heavily male dominated environments. The opportunities they had to work, through ‘dressing the part’ and/or through their education, meant that many women could consider alternatives to marriage. Educated women spent more time with other women and either remained single, or developed relationships with each other, rather than marry a man. Further, men were often wary of women with an education (Faderman, 1991). Subsequently these women earned greater independence, and distanced themselves, from men. This provided some women the freedom to stay in a romantic relationship with another woman, through both the prospect of rejecting traditional marriage and through their economic independence.

The (visible) sexual invert

At the turn of the nineteenth century women who had romantic friendships with other women (Jeffreys, 1983), and those who chose to dress in masculine attire, came to be associated with both feminism and lesbianism (Newton, 1991). Newton has posed the question of whether doctors invented, or simply described the ‘mannish lesbian’ (p.282). Whether lesbians had already carved a visible identity for themselves28, or whether lesbians’ visual identities were purely a creation of sexology, either way, the idea of same-sex sexuality came to be linked with sexual inversion by the medical, sexological and psychological professions.

The notion of sexual invert29 has been acknowledged as having ‘blurred the boundaries between the sexes – either as masculine women or effeminate men’ (Terry, 1999:46). Although German lawyer and early homosexual activist Karl Heinrich Ulrichs (1825-1895) was the first to develop theories of homosexuality and a ‘third sex’ (Terry, 1999), it was German-Austrian psychiatrist and sex researcher Richard von Krafft-Ebing (1840-1902) who has been acknowledged as the first to have constructed the notion of the female lesbian ‘invert’ (Newton, 1991). While he has been described

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28 More recently evidence has come to light which disputes the social constructionist argument that sexologists and psychologists created the social reality of masculine lesbians. These include the diaries of Anne Lister, who was an upper-class woman from Yorkshire. In the early 1800s she engaged in sexual relationships with women. In her diaries (written in code) she describes wearing all black, masculine clothes and leather boots. This provides us with an understanding of conscious and modern lesbian ‘identities’ being carved during a time which predates the work of sexologists and psychologists (Burridge, 2009).

29 I also discuss early sexual inversion theories in more depth in Chapter Three.
as the ‘founding father’ of sexology, he has also been ‘blamed for the stigmatization of sexual minorities’ (Oosterhuis, 2000:7). Krafft-Ebing’s best known work was his publication *Psychopathia Sexualis* (originally published in 1886) which consisted of case studies of ‘sexual inverted’.

The conceptualisation of the sexual inverted draws our attention to the way in which western societies have very specific ideas of what it means to be a man or a woman. Butler (1990/2006), has theorised these ideas as part of the ‘heterosexual matrix’: the way in which western society is (artificially) organised around sex and gender. This organisation has been based on binaries: that there are two (and only two) different sexes (male/female) and their appropriately associated genders (man/woman respectively). These two genders are apparent on the body in men’s ‘masculinity’ and women’s ‘femininity’. Heterosexual desire is mapped from these binaries, so that man is attracted to woman and vice versa. However, masculine women and same-sex desires are not accounted for in this heterosexual matrix:

> ‘The cultural matrix through which gender identity has become intelligible requires that certain kinds of “identities” cannot “exist” – that is, those in which gender does not follow from sex and those in which the practices of desire do not “follow” from either sex or gender’ (Butler, 1990/2006:24).

What cannot be made sense of becomes a threat to the dominant theory (in this case, the two-sex system). It has always been in the interest of men to ensure that the heterosexual matrix is upheld, as it is here (in the matrix) that hegemonic male power is situated (Butler, 1990/2006). Consequently, instead of questioning the institution of heterosexuality, it is what falls *outside* of the heterosexual matrix that is ‘explained away’ lest it should threaten the whole institution of heterosexuality:

> ‘heterosexuality can be seen as having needed to construct an allegedly * perverse, unnatural*, and *imitative* homosexuality as the counterpoint against which to define itself as normal, natural and original’ (Bem, 1995:331, emphasis added).

The ‘strangeness’ of same-sex sexuality was considered a threat to the institution of heterosexuality, and an attempt to dampen the ‘threat’ of same-sex sexuality underpinned the theories of psychology and sexology. Consequently, female homosexuality, and women dressing in a masculine style, are designated the status of
anomalies which fall outside the matrix, and not as a threat to the robustness of the matrix itself (e.g., Bem, 1995).

Inversion theories have been linked to the idea that (within the heterosexual framework) sexual lust could not exist in the absence of a penis, therefore female lust could not have existed in the absence of a man. The logic of the early sexologists followed that if a woman sexually desired other women, she must be ‘endowed with a trapped male soul that phallicized her’ (Newton, 1991:287), and was the source of her lust despite the physical absence of a penis. Invert theories offer an explanation of homosexuality, which enable it to exist within (yet safely outside) the heterosexual matrix by ensuring that the ‘gender opposites’ are incorporated. This offers us further unravelling of the enduring links between masculinity and women’s same-sex sexuality. The female lesbian invert may have been an afterthought to the effeminate homosexually behaved man, but nonetheless the lesbian invert became the popularly understood psychological, physical and visible representation of female homosexuality.

Krafft-Ebing proposed that the appearance of inverts\(^\text{10}\) differed very early in life and that lesbianism often started in childhood with girls who were tomboys (Newton, 1991). In his case studies he implied that there were masculine elements even in the ‘potential’ or burgeoning lesbian:

‘Even as a little child she had an inclination only for the play of boys […] and would gladly have gone as a soldier […] It had always been a great pleasure for her to go about in male clothing’ (Krafft-Ebing, 1886/1997:187)

He asserted that women who cross-dressed or aspired to masculine privileges, were in fact lesbians. Quotations from Krafft-Ebing’s notes and case studies provide a clear picture of how he considered masculine appearance as the mark of the woman who engaged in same-sex behaviour:

‘[C]areful observation of the ladies of large cities soon reveals that uranism [same-sex behaviour] is by no means a rarity. Females who wear their hair short, who dress in the fashion of men, who pursue the sports and pastimes of their male acquaintances, as well as opera singers and actresses who appear on the

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\(^{10}\)Krafft-Ebing used a number of terms to describe women who engaged in same-sex behaviour when he published his case studies. These included ‘antipathic sexuality’, ‘homosexual’/‘homosexual instinct’, ‘uranism’, ‘inversion’ and ‘lesbians’/‘lesbianism’.
stage in male attire by preference *may be suspected of it* (Krafft-Ebing, 1903:282 quoted in Oosterhuis, 2000:206 emphasis added).

Physical appearance and dress was highly associated with behaviour by Krafft-Ebing. He implied that if a woman looked masculine through her dress, appearance and physical body, then she would also behave in a masculine way. In his conceptualisation of ‘inverts’, sexuality is quite literally written on the body:

'X. always had a leaning to male occupations, loved to be among men as one of their own. From her tenth to her fifteenth birthday she worked in the brewery of a relative, if possible *clad in trousers and a leather apron*. [...] She smoked and drank beer. *Female larynx small, badly developed breasts, large hands and feet.*' (Krafft-Ebing, 1886/1997:85, emphasis added).

'Her love for sport, smoking and drinking, her preference for *clothes cut in the fashion of men*, her lack of skill in and liking for female occupations, her love for the study of obtuse and philosophical subjects, her *gait and carriage, severe features, deep voice, robust skeleton*, [and] powerful muscles [...] bore the stamp of the *masculine character*' (Krafft-Ebing, 1886/1997:186, emphasis added).

Krafft-Ebing’s lesbian invert theory was a fusion of the ‘feminist’ women who wanted the privileges of men, both in terms of economic independence, and in social behaviour, such as being able to smoke, drink and socialise, combined with the concept of masculinity and the lesbian (Newton, 1991).

The nearest concept Krafft-Ebing had to the experience of bisexuality was psychic hermaphrodisim\(^3\), which was defined as primarily same-sex desire, with some other sex desire (Oosterhuis, 2000). His case studies indicate that psychic hermaphrodite women could either look masculine like the female invert, or be devoid of any characteristics that made her ‘anomaly’ visibly apparent:

'There was nothing in the behaviour or the manners or the external appearance of this lady which in the least betrayed her anomaly' (Krafft-Ebing, 1886/1997:172).

\(^3\)The sexologists conceptualisation of psychic hermaphrodites and bisexuality are discussed in depth in Chapter Three.
‘[H]er sexual inclinations turned now to woman, now to man [...] the patient did not offer anything extraordinary in her external appearance. Though graceful of build, she was slight of form. Pelvis decidedly feminine, but arms and legs large, and of pronounced masculine type. Female boots did not really fit her, and she had quite crippled and malformed her feet by forcing them into narrow shoes. Genitals quite normal’ (Krafft-Ebing, 1886/1997:172-174, emphasis added).

Psychic hermaphrodites are rendered invisible, because they either look like the ‘normal’ heterosexual, or the ‘abnormal’ homosexual. However, the predominant theorising about women’s sexuality was focused on inversion (lesbianism) rather than on psychic hermaphroditism (bisexuality).

Krafft-Ebing loosely created four ‘categories’ of lesbian. What is clear from these categories is that the perception was that the more deviant the lesbian, the more masculine her appearance (Newton, 1991). First were women who did not appear masculine, but who would be open to the advances of other more masculine lesbians (Newton, 1991). He suggested they were from middle class backgrounds, and attributed their same-sex behaviour to a weakness of their will rather than an inherent medical condition. Hence these ‘womenly women’ were regarded as having developed their same-sex tendencies due to unfavourable circumstance. They were therefore perceived as curable of their homosexuality (Terry, 1999). Second were women who dressed in men’s clothes, and third was those classified as more inverted (and therefore more masculine in appearance and behaviour/roles). The fourth was the most ‘extreme’ masculine woman, described as feminine only in her genitals, everything else about her was masculinised (Newton, 1991). Krafft-Ebing believed these ‘extremely’ masculine women were from lower class backgrounds, and considered them ‘true inverted’ whose homosexuality was incurable due to their ‘inherent defect’. Furthermore, it was these visibly masculine lesbians who he understood as a risk to social order should they be allowed to seduce ‘otherwise normal’ woman who [...] would cling to a “pure invert” if the latter had been successful in seducing her’ (Terry, 1999:64).

Krafft-Ebing indubitably asserted that the physical appearance of lesbians differentiated them from ‘normal’ (i.e., heterosexual) women, and that their sexuality was recognisable on the body. Beyond the masculinisation of lesbians, he also put forward that their appearance was ‘tainted’ with ‘physical stigmata’ such as ‘postures,
gestures, and mannerisms that set them apart from normal people’ (Terry, 1999:46).
He positioned appearance as a marker of lesbianism and suggested that the more masculine the lesbian woman appeared, the more inverted she was. He not only made strong links between appearance and same-sex sexuality, but suggested that these visible differences were a physical expression of the degenerate and defective condition of homosexuality (Terry, 1999). This marked a shift away from the previously accepted notion that lesbians were harmless. Krafft-Ebing’s work implied a two tier system of the passive/invisible/misguided/curable/innocent/middle class lesbians, versus the active/visible/inherently defective/incurable/dangerous/working class lesbian.

British physician and sex researcher Henry Havelock Ellis (1859-1939) further promoted the notion of the masculine lesbian in his work. His theories were loosely based on a simplified version of Krafft-Ebing’s four ‘categories’. Least ‘inverted’ in Ellis’ narrative were those women who had passionate (or romantic) friendships. He classed these women not as congenital inverts, but as repressed and ignorant. He positioned these ‘ignorant’ women as feminine, but plain and termed them ‘pseudohomosexuals’ - the ‘pseudo’ here suggests the way in which a feminine woman cannot be ‘truly’ homosexual, instead only the othered masculine body can contain the ‘deviant’ homosexual (see Ciasullo, 2001). Ellis claimed that due to their (supposed) lack of male suitors, who would have overlooked them in favour of more ‘beautiful’ feminine women, they were not repelled by advances from other women:

‘A class of women to be first mentioned, a class in which homosexuality, while fairly distinct, is only slightly marked, is formed by the women to whom the actively inverted woman is most attracted. These women differ in the first place, from the normal, or average, woman in that they are not repelled or disgusted by lover-like advances from persons of their own sex. They are not usually attractive to the average man [...] Their faces may be plain or ill made, but not seldom they possess good figures [...] they are always womanly. One may, perhaps, say that they are the pick of the women whom the average man would pass by’ (Ellis, 1906/2001:133).

At the end of his continuum of sexual inversion in women, he placed the more extreme ‘actively inverted’ woman (Ellis, 1906/2001:133), who he believed to be congenital inverts and who he described as masculine:
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‘The actively inverted woman differs from the woman of the class just mentioned in one fairly essential character: a more or less distinct trace of masculinity’ (Ellis, 1906/2001:133, emphasis added).

‘The chief characteristic of the sexually inverted woman is a certain degree of masculinity [...] a very pronounced tendency among sexually inverted women to adopt male attire when practicable’ (Ellis, 1906/2001:140-141, emphasis added).

He described the invert as a woman whose masculine appearance would draw attention to her and suggested that she might be perceived by others as someone who did not ‘fit’ as a woman:

‘[T]here is nearly always a disdain for the petty feminine artifices of the toilet. Even when this is not obvious, there are all sorts of instinctive gestures and habits which may suggest to female acquaintances the remark that such a person “ought to have been a man”’ (Ellis, 1906/2001:143).

Newton has argued that Ellis tried to ‘construct the lesbian couple on the heterosexual model, as a “man” and a woman invert’ (Newton, 1991:288). Certainly a trend had emerged for understanding same-sex relationships as consisting of a masculine woman and a feminine woman ‘whereby the seducer was cast as fundamentally masculine by virtue of her manly taste in clothing, her desire to be virile, and her predatory pursuit of the passive (i.e., feminine) woman’ (Terry, 1999:64). Based on this, it could be argued that Krafft-Ebing and Ellis were the first to lay the foundations of the construction of ‘butch’ and ‘femme’ lesbians and relationships, and provided the underpinning of the dominant view of lesbian relationships as (pale) imitations of heterosexual relationships.

Ellis’s work, alongside others from his era, marked a key shift away from previous thoughts that same-sex behaviour in women was not a threat to patriarchal social order. Another sex researcher and contemporary of Ellis was Wilhelm Stekel (1868-1940). He had ‘made it clear that he saw heterosexual sex and specifically sexual intercourse, as a necessary and appropriate regulatory mechanism in the maintenance of male domination and female submission’ (Jeffreys, 1983:177). Researchers of this time (sometimes collectively termed the ‘sex reformers’) shared Stekel’s understandings. They saw both feminism and lesbianism as ‘a serious threat to the
maintenance of male power and domination’ (Jeffreys, 1983:181), and therefore as something which must be halted.

Visibly mannish lesbians were perceived to be preying on innocent heterosexual women and corrupting them (Faderman, 1991; Terry, 1999). The development of the (mythic or otherwise) ‘mannish lesbian’ was heavily linked to women who had strategically forced their way into a ‘man’s world’. Having asserted themselves by ‘mimicking’ men, they could gain economic and social independence, and freedom from the rigid expectations of domestic womanhood. Now, women who dressed in a masculine style became demarcated as degenerate and abnormal (Newton, 1991; Faderman, 1991). By highlighting lesbian’s (so-called) visible differences that went alongside their (so-called) degenerate status, sexologists came to make lesbians identifiable as defective and dangerous. It could be argued that this was a retaliation tactic by powerful men to quash the ‘rise’ of women by demonising both lesbians and feminists^{37} (Jeffreys, 1983; Faderman, 1991).

However, the work of the sexologists brought into evidence lesbian’s existence, and once these masculine appearing women became labelled by sex researchers, the masculine lesbian became more of an established entity. Through the spread and visibility of inversion theories lesbians came to realise that there were others like them. By visibilising lesbians ‘sexologists virtually gave them not only an identity and vocabulary to describe themselves [but] [o]nce they knew there was a sizable minority like them, they could start looking for each other’ (Faderman, 1991:59). By reading the publications of the sexologists, women could realise that they were not the only ones and lesbian subculture gradually emerged as lesbians began to look for each other. Hence the increased visibility of lesbianism gave lesbians a personal and political advantage (Faderman, 1991).

Radclyffe Hall: The lesbian icon who raised the visibility of the ‘mannish lesbian’

The most renowned lesbian novel of the early 1900s was ‘The Well of Loneliness’ by British author Radclyffe Hall (1928/1990). Hall was ‘an “out” and tie-wearing lesbian’

^{37}For many lesbians this pathologisation would have been frightening, for others meaningless, but some lesbians accepted and even utilised the invert theories put forward by sexologists. If their love for women was seen to be a ‘natural’ congenital condition then they were in a position to argue that this could not be changed. Consequently they could defend their romantic relationships, and take ownership of their sexuality as women-loving-women, rather than be ‘married off’ to a man (Faderman, 1991; Newton, 1991).
Part One

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(Newton, 1991:282), and was ‘probably the best known lesbian in the world’ (Bingham, 1998:36). Hall’s appearance and demeanour have been acknowledged as masculine (see, Figure 2.11).

Figure 2.11. Lesbian novelist Marguerite Radclyffe Hall

She often wore suits and a tie, and engaged in smoking, swearing, and drinking, behaviours considered the domain of men, and made clear to her audience that this was inextricably associated with her sexual orientation, which made ‘an enormous impact on lesbians, partly because there were so few overtly lesbian icons available’ (Bingham, 1998:36), hence Hall’s popularity was heavily associated with her appearance:

‘It was Hall’s distinctive style which first made her an object of interest and speculation [...] long before the publication of her lesbian novel, she was well known to the public for her appearance as well as her writing. Her androgynous looks, coupled with a costume which verged on cross-dressing, made her fascinating to her contemporaries [...] In the context of her time, Hall’s open lesbianism was outrageous; not only was she out, but also proud, and she

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33 Hall was an icon for lesbians, and many wrote to her for help. She responded to every letter, and was an early pioneer in arguing against the discrimination of lesbians and defending lesbian sexuality (Bingham, 1998).
signalled her sexual orientation unmistakably by her appearance’ (Bingham, 1998:36).

Hall’s novel *The Well of Loneliness* (1928/1990) is based on the ‘lesbian’ character Stephen (her father longed for a son and named her before she was born) whose physical body, as well as her dress and attire, are more masculine than feminine. Stephen feels frustrated at not being a man, is dissatisfied with her female body, and does not wish to fit the expectations required for a woman. As a child she liked to dress up as her male heroes. She:

‘longed to be William Tell, or Nelson, or the whole Charge of Balaclava: and this led to much foraging in the nursery rag-bag, much hunting of garments once used for charades, much swagger and noise, much strutting and posing, and much staring into the mirror [...] She would say: ‘Do you think that I could be a man, supposing I thought very hard – or prayed Father?’” (Hall, 1928/1990:16/22).

At seventeen she and her feminine mother disagreed on Stephen’s clothes:

‘there was constant warfare between them on the subject of clothes; [...] sometimes Stephen would appear in a thick woollen jersey, or a suit of rough tweeds surreptitiously ordered from the excellent tailor in Malvern. [...] Sometimes Anna [her mother] would triumph, having journeyed to London to procure soft and very expensive dresses, which her daughter must wear in order to please her’ (Hall, 1928/1990:71).

Dresses do not sit well for Stephen, and Hall (1928/1990) depicted an incident where Stephen ‘wrenched off the dress and hurled it from her, longing intensely to rend it, to hurt it’ (p.71). As she becomes older Stephen chooses to wear suits, and this passage is taken from a time when she was preparing to visit a woman who is the subject of her affection:

‘She would go into Malvern that very afternoon and order a new flannel suit at her tailor’s. The suit should be grey with a little white pin stripe, and the jacket she decided, must have a breast pocket. She would wear a black tie – no, better a grey one to match the new suit with the little white pin stripe. She ordered not one suit but three, and she also ordered a pair of brown shoes’ (Hall, 1928/1990:135).
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The character has been argued to be a reflection of the ‘gender inverts’ that sexology, psychology and medicine had focused upon (or arguably created) (Newton, 1991). Although her father was tolerant and understanding of her ‘difference’, Stephen became estranged from her mother (Hall, 1928/1990). The links between Stephen’s struggle for self-acceptance became explicitly linked to the sexologists of the day, when it transpired that her father had read Ulrichs (and made notes in the margins) and Stephen herself read and referred to Krafft-Ebing. To further reinforce these links, the introduction to the book was written by Havelock Ellis (Hall, 1928/1990; Newton, 1991).

Due to its subject matter the book was banned in the U.K. in November 1928 (Love, 2000). In the court battle over the censorship of the book her solicitor made a strategic move to halt the book being banned, and argued that the relationships which Radclyffe Hall portrayed were asexual and ‘normal’ friendships (Newton, 1991). Hall was disappointed, because when writing the novel she had hoped to provide lesbians with the reassurance and support to live more open lives and to provide them with strength and courage amid the hostile culture of the time (Newton, 1991; Bingham, 1998). She wanted ‘inverts’ to be understood and for heterosexual people to sympathise with their circumstance (Newton, 1991; Bingham, 1998), and hoped that her portrayal of lesbian suffering would make heterosexual people feel guilty at their condemnation of lesbianism. Her fictional writing was an attempt at gaining a space in which lesbians could be seen, heard and potentially understood, and to publish a novel that dared to depict a lesbian relationship posed a great risk to her career as a successful novelist (Bingham, 1998). It has been argued that she wrote about, and raised the profile and visibility of, the complexities of being a lesbian (Newton, 1991).

‘Lesbian chic’

Post World War One (WWI) a younger generation rejected Victorian values and embraced a more bohemian approach to life. The 1920s saw a cultural trend towards women, perhaps for the first time, being permitted their own sexual desire. This was largely down to the popularisation of the theories of Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), and signified a dramatic shift away from conceptualising women as asexual, towards one of women having sexual urges which must be satisfied. Consequently the boundaries of sexual morality changed and same-sex encounters became more tolerated, which in turn created the possibility of women ‘experimenting’ with relationships with other

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women. This evolved into the notion that to be a lesbian was ‘chic’ and with the times (Faderman, 1991; Newton, 1991). It is possible that as women engaged in sexual relationships with both men and women, bisexuality began to be understood as a category of sexual identification, but as an aside to a ‘primary’ relationship with a man. Initially the notion of ‘lesbian chic’ (Faderman, 1991), was focused on behaviour and experimentation rather than looks and style. However, alongside this cultural shift came new fashions for women, which included ‘bobbed’ hairstyles and shorter skirts. The new tolerance of sexual behaviour contributed a great deal to the growth of a lesbian subculture. It could be argued that as sexual experimentation became socially acceptable, so too did expressing one’s sexuality through appearance. However, as is discussed later, it was not until the 1990s that lesbian chic saw a real (re)surgence.
Sexuality and appearance during the World War II years

WWII: The pink triangle: from a symbol of repression, to remembrance and resistance

The atrocities against Jewish people during the Second World War have been thoroughly documented. Perhaps less well documented is the Nazi attempt to exterminate other entire populations including (among other groups\textsuperscript{34}) lesbians and gay men. It has been estimated that tens of thousands of lesbians and gay men were killed during WWII\textsuperscript{35} (Fernback, 1997).

The Nazi ideology of ‘homosexuality as degenerate’ led to the mistreatment of gay men beyond that of those who had committed other ‘offences’ (Heger, 1972/1997). In Nazi concentration camps, prisoners were forced to wear a triangle to denote their offences \textsuperscript{36} (Jensen, 2002; Heger, 1972/1997), and homosexual men were made to wear the pink triangle (Heger, 1972/1997). This demarcation served to highlight the ‘degeneracy’ of these men and exemplifies to the extreme how visibility can be a danger to the individuals who are visible or visibilised. Symbols represent an alternative to dress and appearance in clearly marking out sexuality, and the Pink Triangle was perhaps the first symbol of homosexuality (Jensen, 2002).

The experiences of gay men in Prisoner of War (POW) camps have been more extensively documented than that of lesbians. However, lesbians too would have had to wear either a pink, or a black triangle (Jensen, 2002). There is no literature which indicates that bisexual people were recognised within the context of POW camps.

During the post war era the stigmatisation of gay men and lesbians was intensified by rumours that associated homosexuality with fascism and the Nazis\textsuperscript{37}. These myths, alongside the continued illegality of same-sex behaviour (with particular emphasis on

\textsuperscript{34}For example ‘gypsies’, non-white people, those with particular mental or physical disorders, Jehovah’s Witnesses, criminals and those who politically opposed the Nazi regime

\textsuperscript{35}It is possible that the Nazis did not necessarily intend to eliminate all homosexuals per se, but rather to eliminate homossexuality through various techniques such as ‘hard labor, castration, dangerous and experimental hormone treatments, and “reeducation”’ Jensen, 2002:346).

\textsuperscript{36}Yellow for Jews, black for anti-socials, red for political, purple for Jehovah’s Witnesses, green for criminals, blue for emigrants, pink for homosexuals, brown for gypsies’ (Heger, 1972/1997:32).

\textsuperscript{37}These were myths deliberately started by particular political groups for their own gain, which played on the small number of gay men in the higher echelons of the Nazi party to discredit all homosexuals as fascists. These rumours have long since dispelled by scholars (see Jensen, 2002).
male homosexuality), meant that most gay men and lesbians were too wary to 'report' their experiences in the prison camps (even after the war had ended when others were doing so) for fear of a hostile reception. They may also have preferred not to recall or relive their horrific experiences (Jensen, 2002; Fernback, 1997).

Consequently their suffering at the hands of the Nazis was silenced and suppressed. Examples of this include the omission of gay men and lesbians from memorials for the victims of Nazi rule, and their exclusion from the financial compensation which was received by other prisoners of war (Jensen, 2002; Fernback, 1997). These forms of exclusion invisibilised not only gay men and lesbians, but also their suffering at the hands of Nazi Germany. This illustrates how at times individuals have had to be silent and invisible. While to do so was safer than making oneself visible and open to abuse, it meant that any homosexual ‘collective’ or ‘collective voice’ did not exist. It was only when individuals began to speak out about their suffering that the liberation of homosexual men (and in turn women) could begin.

The post-war West German gay liberation movement did not emerge with any significance until the part-decriminalisation of homosexual acts in the late 1960s.\textsuperscript{38} This change in law created an opportunity for stories of concentration camps, and reports of deaths at the hands of Nazi persecution, to be told. From 1973 onwards publications produced by the gay liberation group ‘Homosexualle Aktion Westberlin’ (HAW) encouraged gay men to wear the pink triangle. This marked an historic turn from gay men being forced to wear the pink triangle to demarcate them, to them choosing to wear the pink triangle to highlight their extreme suffering during WWII (Jensen, 2002). This act signified the roots of resistance, of rising up against oppression, and gradually the symbol of entrapment became one of empowerment.

By wearing the pink triangle, HAW had particular personal and political purposes in mind. They theorised that gay men would be both recognised and discriminated against through the pink triangle, but significantly by choosing to demarcate themselves they would create a ‘victim identity’. Although discrimination would be a side-effect of a deliberately created visibility in the short term, it would be worthwhile.

\textsuperscript{38}In 1969 in West Germany the reform of Paragraph 175 of the criminal code meant that homosexual acts between men over the age of twenty-one were no longer a criminal act. This was followed in 1973 by the age of consent being lowered to eighteen. Nonetheless the German government at the time were still essentially anti-homosexual as evidenced by their dismissal of some gay people from the military and civil service, and their generally discriminatory approach despite these changes in law (Jensen, 2002).
in making lesbians and gay men themselves realise how oppressed they were and
draw their attention to how homophobic their culture was (Jensen, 2002).

Further, HAW considered that visibility would be beneficial for lesbians and gay men. It
would make them realise how oppressed they were, and allow them to recognise each
other as homosexuals. This would lead to the consolidation of gay men and lesbians in
order to create a community, which would be more effective for the purpose of
political action. It was also hoped that visibility would be a useful strategy to draw
attention to homosexuality in order to gain sympathy toward their oppression from a
wider (i.e., heterosexual) audience (Jensen, 2002). Since the 1970s the pink triangle
(and the colour pink) has continued to be worn by gay men and lesbians as a
statement of pride, and an emblem of resistance and empowerment, to raise political
consciousness and bring to attention present-day issues of suffering and oppression
39, for example, during the early years of the AIDS epidemic, activists utilised the pink
triangle in their protests (Gamson, 1989).

**WWII: Lesbian in/visibility in the military**

While the pink triangle was demarcating lesbians and gay men in POW camps, the
appearance of lesbians and gay men was also of relevance in the military. Appearance
played a part for lesbians during WWII, and this era changed the lives of many
lesbians. There are limited resources to draw upon, and this discussion is unavoidably
focused exclusively on the U.S. military, because only U.S. sources are available (e.g.,
Bérubé, 1991; Meyer, 1992). Once again bisexuality does not feature in the literature
on this topic.

In part due to constructions of the masculine or mannish lesbian, the stereotype of
women in the military during the 1930s and 1940s was that they were lesbians and/or
cross-dressers40. Women who were members of the military compromised their own

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39 However, in the 1990s Sara Hart, editor of the U.S. gay magazine ’10 Percent’ argued that to
wear the Pink Triangle as a symbol of gay and lesbian pride against present day harassment and
discrimination was to trivialise the past suffering during WWII. Some readers objected to this,
and argued that the oppression of gay men and lesbians was a topic which still required
attention. Other readers suggested that it ought to only be worn in selective ways, such as at
particularly sombre events or occasions (see Jensen, 2002).

40 These common conceptions of women in the military arose due to their position within this
masculine dominated profession. An alternative understanding was that women who chose to
enter in the military must be ‘man-mad’ and therefore prostitutes (Meyer, 1992). I use this
reputation, though the risk of being associated with these images. Therefore, women were likely to be put off joining the war effort, but were needed to fight for their country, hence a more positive image of military women needed to be cultivated (Meyer, 1992).

Echoing the sexologist’s argument, women dressing and behaving in a masculine fashion was seen as menacing to ‘traditional’ values. Women (and their sexuality) were considered by dominant society to threaten male dominated culture. This was particularly the case within the military because of its history as a masculine institution. Women’s economic and social independence, granted through their membership of the military (Meyer, 1992), was associated with public fears of a decline in standards of respectability and morality:

‘The potentially “masculinizing” effect of the military on women was not only in women’s taking on male characteristics, appearance, and power but also in women adopting a more aggressive, independent, and “masculine” sexuality’ (Meyer, 1992:583-584).

Further, sexologists had linked ‘masculine’ occupations with lesbian sexuality. Therefore, the idea that women might acquire a ‘masculine sexuality’ was viewed by society as not only a threat to traditional gender boundaries, but also more likely to cultivate an increase in lesbianism. Women in the army were encouraged to maintain and assert their femininity through their appearance, and through ‘appropriate’ non-promiscuous and ‘respectable’ behaviour (Meyer, 1992). They were reminded in military advertisements that ‘even though their labor was desperately needed [...] their jobs were only temporary and ultimately belonged to men’ (Bérubé, 1991).

The U.S. military were (unofficially and temporarily) lenient\textsuperscript{41} towards those they suspected to be lesbians, because as many people as possible were needed for the war effort (Bérubé, 1991; Meyer, 1992). Nonetheless official proscriptions dictated that lesbianism was to be discouraged, particularly if a woman were visibly lesbian for example through their ‘mannish’ hairstyles. While army regulations meant that homosexuals could be discharged for their sexuality, lesbians rarely were, and ‘WAC

\textsuperscript{41}The military were less tolerant of male homosexuality, which was more heavily policed than female homosexuality (Bérubé, 1991).
[Women’s Army Corps] officers were warned to consider this action only in the most extreme of situations’ (Meyer, 1992:592). It was considered that dismissing lesbians would result in intensive public scrutiny, therefore more informal methods of controlling sexuality were employed. Consequently, rather than being discharged, women who appeared masculine in any way were encouraged to change their appearance or behaviour accordingly. In WWII then, masculine appearance was understood as a sign of sexuality, and women’s masculine dress and appearance in the military was ‘policed’ accordingly (Meyer, 1992).

This attempt to ensure that (heterosexual) ‘order’ was maintained did not stop lesbians in the military service creating their own communities. In order to recognise each other, some lesbians adopted a certain way of walking, particular mannerisms, and coded language (Meyer, 1992). Once these lesbians found each other they socialised together and, in larger cities, explored the nightlife. Businesses saw the financial potential of catering for a gay and lesbian audience, and specifically lesbian and gay (illegal) bars began to flourish (Bérubé, 1991). During the war years, a more tolerant social climate temporarily existed, which allowed a gay community to exist, which was ‘instrumental in creating a lesbian subculture’ (Rothblum, 1994a:193).

Women fighting for their country meant that gender boundaries were broken down, and that lesbians were granted some freedom. The end of the war marked the end of a tolerant era for women in general, and for lesbians specifically, but critically the war had provided the underpinnings of a community and subculture which would re-emerge in the 1950s (Bérubé, 1991).

**Sexuality and appearance post World War II**

**The emergence of the (visible) butch and (invisible) femme**

The next aspect of appearance and sexuality I discuss is the more definitive emergence of butch and femme looks and ‘looking’. This section first covers the history of butch-femme, but also includes a discussion of contemporary understandings, because these identities remain pertinent today. In the literature which discusses the popularisation of butch-femme there is no reference to the existence of bisexuality.

It has been suggested that the terms ‘butch’ and ‘femme’ did not exist until the 1950s (Reilly & Lynch, 1990; Rothblum, 1994a). However, at various junctures the foundations of ‘butch’ and ‘femme’ identities and roles began to emerge. For example
Part One

Chapter Two: Unravelling the links between sexuality and appearance

Faderman has suggested that since the turn of the century there had been dances where the lesbian invert (e.g., ‘man’) danced with more a feminine lesbian (e.g., ‘woman’), which might have signified an early lesbian culture, and the first ‘conscious “butches” and “femmes”’ (Faderman, 1991:59). It could be suggested that the women who dressed (or ‘passed’) as men during the late 1800s provided the foundations of the masculine or ‘butch’ lesbian. Alternatively, early sexologists’ conceptualisations of the masculine ‘mannish’ lesbian (the ‘real’ congenital lesbian invert) and the feminine lesbian (the woman ‘seduced’) could have provided the building blocks (e.g., Ellis, 1906/2001; Newton, 1991; Terry, 1999). Finally, lesbian’s wartime experiences of dressing more practically (in trousers and army uniforms) may also have played a part, but however it first came about, butch and femme ‘role playing’ within lesbian social space, and butch-femme identities and relationships, began to be recognised and written about in a more notable way from the 1940s and 1950s onwards (Faderman, 1991).

The butch-femme model was that in lesbian relationships the woman ‘was to be either “butch” (masculine or the active giver of sexual pleasure) or “fem/femme”⁴² (feminine or the passive receiver of sexual pleasure)’ (Reilly & Lynch, 1990:3). Butch lesbians could be identified by their masculine dress, appearance and mannerisms. However, because femme lesbians looked more traditionally ‘feminine’, they were only identifiable contextually, via their association with butch lesbians, or through the bars that they frequented (Davis & Kennedy, 1986).

⁴²The word ‘femme’ is most commonly used in scholarly writing, but in the U.S. the word ‘fem’ is also used (Adams, 1988). I use femme unless directly quoting a text which does otherwise.
especially in the early days of butch-femme, differences between ‘butch’ and ‘femme’ appearance were not necessarily as pronounced (or as indeed as glamorised) as the image in Figure 2.12 might suggest. In representations of butch-femme on the covers of early lesbian themed novels, particular knowledge of lesbian cultural codes was required to understand what was being depicted43 (Zimet, 2000). For example, in the 1950 novel titled Women’s Barracks (Torres, 1950/2005, see, Figure 2.13), it is the sly exchange of looks between the short haired uniform wearing (butch) woman and the long haired bra clad woman (femme), which would have clued lesbians into the butch-femme theme of the cover, and the lesbian content of the novel itself44 (Zimet, 2000).

43These novels were intended to be a titillating read for heterosexual men. However, they were also found and read by lesbians, who may have found the novels an assurance that there were others like them. However, this may have been rather short lived as many of these novels held stories of lesbian characters being punished or (re)turning to heterosexuality (Zimet, 2000).

44These novels and the imagery of the covers have gained popularity as ‘kitsch’ items within lesbian culture and postcards of the covers are commonly available.
Figure 2.13. Cover of the lesbian themed novel Women's Barracks

Other codes included the butch (sometimes but not always) wearing trousers and flat footwear, and being brunette while the femme tended to wear skirts, or be clad in only her underwear, and be blonde (Zimet, 2000), as exemplified in Twilight Lovers (Gardner, 1964, see, Figure 2.14) and Satan Was A Lesbian (Haley, 1966, see, Figure 2.15).
Chapter Two: Unravelling the links between sexuality and appearance

Figure 2.14. Cover of the lesbian themed novel *Twilight Lovers*

Figure 2.15. Cover of the lesbian themed novel *Satan Was a Lesbian*
There is no evidence to suggest that butch-femme dyad was necessarily a widespread phenomenon among lesbians themselves, and instead the popularisation of the concept been partly attributed to the images appropriated in both fictional and scientific writing (Faderman, 1981/1997). There are various theories as to why the butch-femme model of lesbian roles came into existence. The first is that for lesbians during this era there were no relationship models to follow other than that of heterosexual relationships. Consequently lesbians may have mimicked the heterosexual relationship model, which therefore dictated that a man(nish lesbian) and a woman (femme) were required (Reilly & Lynch, 1990). In the oppressive environment of this era to have ‘imitated’ heterosexual relationships would have been one strategy in order to ‘fit in’ (Reilly & Lynch, 1990)\(^5\).

However, butch-femme relationships were not necessarily a submissive gesture to survive and fit in with mainstream society (Nguyen, 2008). A second theory is that the ‘imitation’ of heterosexual relationship structure was indicative of lesbians’ attempts to challenge the popular understandings of lesbian relationships as ‘variant, deviant, perverted, and pathological’ (Reilly & Lynch, 1990:3). These lesbians asserted their relationships as equivalent to heterosexual relationships and therefore ‘normal’. In this second version of butch-femme, it is not about fitting in with an accepted normality, but about asserting an alternative form of that normality as acceptable. In this sense butch-femme roles could also have been understood as a form of powerful resistance to heterosexual prejudice, rather than collusion with it (Davis & Kennedy, 1986; Nguyen, 2008).

In whatever way butch-femme relationships were conceptualised, the popular understanding was of an association between masculine dress and appearance with ‘butches’, and of feminine dress and appearance with ‘femmes’ (Rothblum, 2010). However, research conducted by Davis and Kennedy (1986), in which they interviewed women who were involved in lesbian communities in New York from the 1940s to the 1960’s, contributes an alternative perspective. One participant stressed that butch-

\(^5\) However, even when ‘mimicking’ heterosexual relations, lesbian relationships have always differed from them. Whereas the man in the heterosexual relationship was dominant and interested in only his own pleasure, some butches (in particular the ‘stone butch’) enjoyed giving pleasure and never expected her femme partner to reciprocate (Reilly & Lynch, 1990; Davis & Kennedy, 1986).
femme attire was not to be taken-for-granted, and that it was impossible to know a woman’s identity until you were in bed with her:

‘You can’t tell butch-fem by people’s dress. You couldn’t even really tell in the fifties. I knew women with long hair, fem clothes, and found out they were butches. Actually I even knew one who wore men’s clothes, haircuts and ties, who was a fem’ (Davis & Kennedy, 1986:13).

This narrative challenges simplistic understandings of butch and femme appearance as being inextricable from butch and femme behaviour (also see, Rothblum, 2010). This is critically important because it raises the point that there is a need for caution in the interpretation of women’s identities through their dress, for all is not necessarily what it may seem. Perhaps the femme who chose to dress in men’s clothes, can be understood in part through a model of the privileged masculine dyke identity. It has been asserted that the visibility of masculine or ‘mannish’ lesbians (e.g., ‘true invert’) throughout the history of sexuality has rendered any other form of lesbian expression as invisible and invalid (Maltry & Tucker, 2002).

The visible butch

The dyke/butch identity has been seen as valid, visible and authentic, because she ‘wears her sexuality’ in a way that makes her difference clear for all to see. However, the butch has also been villainised. Mainstream heterosexist society has tended to exude anxiety around masculine women and perceived them as threatening. The sexologists’ stigmatisation of masculine women remains evidenced today, because female masculinity has remained a ‘pathological sign of misidentification and maladjustment’ (Halberstam 1998:9). Queer theorist Judith Halberstam has highlighted how this relies on western culture’s insistence that it is ‘the equation of maleness plus masculinity that adds up to social legitimacy’ (1998:16), which ties in with Butler’s (1990/2006) concept of the heterosexual matrix outlined earlier. The association between ‘masculine’ and ‘man’ is so deeply entrenched within the culture that it becomes almost impossible to disentangle the two. This has implications for butches: by ‘lacking’ maleness, but being masculine, butch lesbians ‘lack’ social legitimacy (Halberstam, 1998).

A new generation of scholars, of whom many are queer theorists (or scholars who draw on queer theory) now conceptualise ‘butch’ and ‘masculine femininities’ as
radical political resistance to gender normativity (e.g., Nguyen, 2008; Halberstam, 1998). The ‘current butch-femme culture differentiates itself by being adamant that their roles stem from choice rather than survival, play rather than essentialism, and subversive desire rather than a mimicking of heterosexuality’ (Nguyen, 2008).

However ‘butch’ is interpreted, it has played an important part in lesbian visibility and butch-femme was more than just about appearance and relationships, but a culture in itself (Nguyen, 2008). The butch aesthetic contributed to lesbian visibility in terms of the creation of community through bars and meeting places as lesbians began to be able to recognise each other. Butch can be interpreted as one of the earliest manifestations of ‘pride’ in ‘announcing’ one’s sexuality, in part through clothing and appearance. The masculine lesbian invert became the visible image of lesbians in the latter part of the 19th century (Faderman, 1981/1997), and the depiction of mannish lesbians and their femme partners may have partly created the lesbian visibility of the 1940s/1950s. Butch-femme looking became a stipulation of ‘belonging’ within community: ‘Lesbians who were neither clearly butch nor femme were termed kiki and were unwelcome’ (Rothblum, 1994a:93).

More recently, it has been suggested that butch and femme role playing has ceased as a structure for many lesbians, either sexually or in terms of wider lifestyle (Reilly & Lynch, 1990; Rothblum, 2010). However, the butch aesthetic has remained in existence and re-emerged during the last twenty years in multiple guises (Nguyen, 2008).

**The invisible femme, the visible butch and the neither/nor bisexual**

The lesbian body has been represented as the body in extremes; either as an extremely masculine pseudo male, or extremely feminine narcissistic female. Creed (1995), has argued that:

‘it is the ideological function of the lesbian body to warn the ‘normal’ woman about the dangers of undoing or rejecting her bodily socialization. This is why the culture points with most hypocritical concern at the mannish lesbian, the butch lesbian, while deliberately ignoring the femme lesbian whose body in no way presents itself to the straight world as different or deviant’ (Creed, 1995:101).

Creed (1995) makes an enticing argument when she discusses butch lesbian visibility as a ‘warning’ of the deviance of lesbian sexuality. The resistant butch body draws
more attention to lesbianism than the femme, who can 'blend in' with the mainstream (e.g., Levitt & Hiestand, 2005). Drawing attention to the butch 'deviant' body brings it to the fore, which in turn renders the 'normal' femme body even more invisible, as it can live only in the shadow of the visible butch.

While the butch has been framed as 'the visibly defiant lesbian flaunting her resistance to a ubiquitous heterosexuality' (Adams, 1988:1), femme lesbians have been criticised by some for their 'patriarchal practices of femininity and for “voluntarily” oppressing themselves' (Nguyen, 2008:667). Where butch has become visible, the femme relies on the butch to be seen. However, Creed has recognised the potential that the *femme* body holds when it serves to remind us that any woman could be a 'lesbian in disguise', waiting to tempt 'normal' women with 'the promise of deviant pleasures' (Creed, 1995:101). This threatens the heterosexual 'norm' by bringing to light that any woman could be a 'potential lesbian' (Luzzato & Gvion, 2004).

Butch-femme is heavily interwoven with concepts of sex and gender, and accordingly lesbian identities became based on a binary, with butch as 'man' and femme as 'woman'. Gender is popularly understood to have only two options, hence once lesbian identity came to mirror gender so it too had only two options. Commonly held binary understandings that interlink gender and sexuality do not allow a space where bisexuality can be positioned, because there is no 'third gender' for it to fit into. It can only fit either with a butch lesbian identity (hence losing its authentic 'bisexualness' as it becomes authentically lesbian), or a femme lesbian identity (hence losing its authentic 'bisexualness' and becoming understood either as femme lesbian or as heterosexual).

*Differing strategies of in/visibility within the rise of the gay and lesbian rights movement: From the homophile organisations to the Stonewall Riots*

I now return to the historical narrative and discuss changes in the public visibility of lesbians and gay men during the 1950s and 1960s, which saw debates regarding the best strategies for how they ought to 'appear' in order for any form of liberation to be successful. Scholars have noted that lesbians (and gay men) were largely invisible during this era:

'The lesbian in the public imagination of the 1950s was only whispered about: she led a shadowy, tragic existence, cut off from family and denied social acceptance.'
Her tragedy, both in reality and in melodramatic fictional accounts, was her invisibility' (Schultz, 2001:385).

The riots at the Stonewall Inn gay bar in Greenwich Village in 1969 were of great political significance, and have been described as the ‘birth of gay pride’ (Feinberg, 1993/2003). However, the seeds of the gay and lesbian rights movement had been planted some years previously:

‘[Stonewall is] taken to mark the birth of the modern gay and lesbian political movement – that moment in time when gays and lesbians recognized all at once their mistreatment and their solidarity [...whereas the...] decades preceding Stonewall [are] regarded by most gays and lesbians as some vast Neolithic wasteland’ (Duberman, 1993:xvii).

Even before WWII, in 1924, Chicago’s Society for Human Rights was one of the first gay rights organisations to exist (Meeker, 2001). However, it is the Homophile Organisations of the 1950s that I now focus upon.

The Homophile Organisations: strategies of anonymity and assimilation

Following the interventions of psychologists and sexologists, interest during the post war years was focused on debates about whether homosexuality was a sickness or a crime (Esterberg, 1990). The two organisations most closely associated with the homophile movement, were the Daughters of Bilitis (DOB) and the Mattachine Society (MS). Both were formed post WWII, but pre-Stonewall (Esterberg, 1990), during a period when being gay or lesbian was synonymous with an extremely secretive and repressed existence, because homosexuality remained stigmatised by society (Schultz, 2001; Esterberg, 1990):

'We were labeled “sick” and needing “cure”. We were mostly invisible as gay, which made it hard for gay men and lesbians to develop good social lives and to create a movement to battle injustice and prejudice’ (Gittings, 2008:289).

Both the Mattachine Society and the Daughters of Bilitis called themselves ‘homophile organisations’, to avoid the term ‘homosexual’ and its associated controversial ‘sexual’ link. They encouraged lesbians and gay men to present themselves as responsible

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46It was the middle class, politically motivated, monogamous men of the Mattachine Society that Evelyn Hooker (1957) used in her groundbreaking research on homosexuality described in Chapter Three.
citizens (partly through how they dressed and appeared), that would not trouble
dominant society, but that could fit in and behave ‘appropriately’ (Meyer, 2006). This
strategy of assimilation underpinned their argument that gay men and lesbians were
inoffensive and harmless.

The main focus in this writing is on the Daughters of Bilitis, due to my primary interest
in women’s history. However, a brief overview of the Mattachine Society is provided
to highlight similarity in the debates that took place within these organisations over
strategy and visibility.

The Mattachine Society

In 1951, the Mattachine Society (MS) was founded in San Francisco (Meeker, 2001;
Warner, 2004). The MS aimed to unite gay men so that they could support each other,
and defend and extend their rights (Meeker, 2001). The name of the Mattachine
Society gives some indication of their approach to visibility: Mattachines were
travelling performers whose satirical performances meant that they stayed hidden
behind a mask. Similarly much of the early work of the MS was secretive. The
Mattachine Society:

‘did not directly challenge the social requirement that homosexuals remain
invisible. While […] they […] displayed inestimable bravery in seeking to unify
homosexuals in private, anonymous settings […] The Mattachine Society […] was
not yet ready to confront unswervingly the demon of public invisibility’ (Meeker,
2001:89).

Members often maintained anonymity and used pseudonyms to mask their true
identities, and leadership of the MS was unknown to most members. (Meeker, 2001).
The Daughters of Bilitis

In 1955, Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon formed the Daughters of Bilitis with six other middle class women (Schultz, 2001), in Los Angeles (Faderman, 1991). The DOB allowed lesbians to come together, be themselves, and understand and support each other. Although started as a social organisation for lesbians to meet (Faderman, 1991), the DOB developed into ‘the first lesbian social-political organization in the United States’ (Schultz, 2001:380). The name of the Daughters of Bilitis was chosen from a poem with an oblique reference to lesbianism, by Pierre Louïs. Barbara Gittings, an early member of the New York DOB, has described how lesbians and gay men were ‘denounced as immoral and sinful’ and ‘punished as criminals and lawbreakers’ (Gittings, 2008:289). For these reasons, it was considered important that the name would not convey that members were lesbians to anyone who was not also a member, lest meetings could be raided by police (Schultz, 2001). The organisation has been acknowledged as an extremely brave undertaking (Esterberg, 1990), and the aims of the DOB evolved over time:

‘The first Daughters thought that their new group would provide a nice place for lesbians to meet; soon they added a newsletter [and] a network of local chapters. [...] Through the publicity their conferences generated, they began, carefully at first and then with increasing candor, to talk with newspaper reporters, radio producers, and television talk-show hosts about the reality of their relatively ordinary existences. The Daughters slowly lifted the veil of secrecy that surrounded lesbians’ daily lives in mid-twentieth century America’ (Gallo, 2006:xxi).

It was hoped that removal of a ‘veil of secrecy’ would validate the reality of being a lesbian, and aid individual lesbians in overcoming their own negative feelings about their sexuality. The DOB wanted to abolish the shame that many lesbians felt (as a result of their invisible existence within a closeted and repressed society) (Gallo, 2006; Esterberg, 1990). The DOB supported lesbians through meetings, and through their published newsletter entitled The Ladder. However, their debates and discussions about sexuality also aimed to educate the public about homosexuality.

The members of the Daughters of Bilitis remained mainly white and middle class. However, they were keen to make it known that they welcomed non-white members of all classes and did gain some such members in later years (Gallo, 2006).
The group was not ‘radical’ in the same way that later lesbian and gay movements were (Esterberg, 1990; Schultz, 2001). They advocated that lesbians ‘come out’ of the closet and help to raise public awareness, but encouraged them to do so conservatively (Jeffreys, 1989/1993b; Schultz, 2001). The DOB advocated conformity and employed a strategy of ‘blending in’ as ‘respectable women’ (Schultz, 2001), as exemplified in this early photo (see, Figure 2.16) of the founding members:

Figure 2.16. The Daughters of Bilitis (no date)

They recommended that members dress and behave a manner that was aligned with a normative (white/middle class) femininity in order to associate ‘being a lesbian’ with ‘being a legitimate woman’. They believed that butch-femme aesthetics increased society’s negative outlook on lesbians (Rothblum, 1994a), and consequently they strongly rejected butch or mannish dressing, because they saw ‘looking different’ as bad publicity (Schultz, 2001). The DOB hoped that their assimilationist strategies would promote understanding and acceptance, and integration and belonging for

48 See Esterberg (1990) for discussion of how The Ladder reflects the way in which the strategies of the DOB changed, particularly in the mid-to-late 1960s, and Gallo (2006) for a more general discussion of the organisation’s history. With rising objection to sickness and crime models, in the later years of the DOB many members advocated a more political and activist based framework, while other members remained convinced that the research and discussion based strategy was the best route to advancing the homophile movement.
49 This reiterates how class has been a factor in appearance norms: working class women tended to be more accepting of butch-femme than middle class women (Jeffreys, 1989/1993b; Crawley, 2001), and the latter had more chance of fitting in and were more likely to look, and pass, as heterosexual (Jeffreys, 1989/1993; Rothblum, 1994a).
50 Note that this rejection of ‘disallowing’ lesbians to look ‘different’ via dressing in a more masculine fashion, may in fact have had the effect of amplifying still further the pathologisation of the ‘mannish’ or ‘butch’ lesbian. This was echoed in 1970s second wave feminism, during which time butches became pathologised by many feminists (Halberstam, 1998). Halberstam refers to the rejection of ‘butch’ as ‘butchphobia’, and argues that such phobia leads to a (mis)reading of masculine women as overly simplified to be ‘like men’ (and therefore not radical) (Halberstam, 1998).
lesbians within wider mainstream society. The main aim was that, through these strategies, homosexuality would be legitimated and eventually decriminalised (Esterberg, 1990; Schultz, 2001). This strategy of conforming was markedly different from later strategies, but was arguably a necessary and powerful step in the progression of the gay and lesbian rights movement.

The Minorities Research Group

In the U.K., a more political group of British lesbians called the Minorities Research Group\(^1\) (MRG) was established in London in 1963 by Esmé Langley (Jennings, 2004; Turner, 2009). The MRG had similar goals to the DOB (Richardson, 2004), and also had a publication akin to The Ladder, called Arena 3 (Jeffreys, 1989/1993b; Ross, 2009). It has been documented that debates about appearance arose within the group, and that some lesbian members objected to others attending meetings wearing men’s clothes. It was reported in a 1964 issue of Arena 3 that a vote had been taken about whether ‘the wearing of male attire at MTG meetings is inappropriate’\(^2\) (Jeffreys, 1989/1993b:173). It is clear to see that debates about, and strategies of, dress and appearance were an important part of the early homophile movements.

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\(^1\) June Hopkins sampled women from the MRG for her lesbian affirmative research on The Lesbian Personality, (discussed in Chapter Three) (Hopkins, 1969). This mirrored Evelyn Hooker’s (1957) sampling strategy with men from the MS, mentioned above.

\(^2\) Twenty-five agreed, and twenty eight disagreed, with six abstentions (Jeffreys, 1989/1993b).
Stonewall and the 1970s

Despite the work of these early ‘homophile’ organisations, the theme of ‘invisibility’ continued throughout the early years of the lesbian and gay rights movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s. However, the seed had been sown for the notion of ‘coming out’ as gay or lesbian, albeit mainly to each other, and in a discrete way. Nonetheless this still marked a critical shift away from anonymity and towards being ‘out’, and eventually both disclosing, and being ‘proud’ of, a gay or lesbian identity. The homophile organisations had ‘presented homosexuality as dignified, non-threatening, and assimilable to the mainstream. Gay liberationists of the early 1970s, by contrast, sought a full-tilt social and sexual revolution’ (Meyer, 2006:450).

In the late 1960s, the lesbian and gay rights movement began to more firmly establish itself and ‘push for radical changes in their legal and social status’ (Jensen, 2002:321). An important turning point was the events of June 27th 1969 (Armstrong & Crage, 2006; Meyer, 2006; Duberman, 1993), when the police raided the Stonewall Inn in New York, a known ‘homosexual bar’. It was not unusual for such bars to be raided, but this night was different, and immensely meaningful, because the residents of the bar fought back, leading to a three day riot. This has led to the event being remembered, and understood as the beginning of a political movement, and of the liberation of homosexuality (Duberman, 1993).

Meyer (2006) has argued that ‘the rhetoric of visibility’ around the Stonewall riots has largely been overlooked by scholars of art history and gay politics. He has suggested that the use of visual images, such as photographs of the riots, formed a critical part of the gay liberation movement of this era. Following Stonewall, an increasing number of gay newspapers were founded, which often included photographs: ‘newspapers such as Come Out were founded in part to document the GLF [Gay Liberation Front]’s protests and public events and thereby recirculate the group’s activist efforts and political visibility’ (Meyer, 2006:446-447).

The Gay Liberation Front (GLF) were ‘a radical activist group founded in the weeks just after the riots’ (Meyer, 2006:442), and ‘coming out’ became one of their key strategies. The GLF ‘demanded that homosexual men and women proclaim their sexuality to family, friends, colleagues, and the larger public world […] not simply as a private act of self-disclosure but as a public demand for visibility’ (Meyer, 2006:447).
The GLF used photographic images (see, Figure 2.17) of gay men and lesbians in magazines in order to draw attention to key protests and events, and to encourage gay and lesbian people to come out, unite, and become public in their call for equality:

*Figure 2.17. An example of a Gay Liberation Front image of gay men and lesbians*

By the mid 1970s scholars were writing of the importance of ‘coming out’. Lee (1977) has described the cultural shift which took place as gay people began make their sexuality known. Gay men had previously been an invisible minority, living in the shadows of mainstream culture. Coming out aided immensely in the formation of communities and groups, which provided safe spaces where identity could be validated, and gay men could work together to instigate political and social changes (Lee, 1977). While these events were happening in the U.S., they were mirrored in the U.K. (Plummer, 1999:133). It could be argued that the years directly following the Stonewall riots are what led to the amalgamation of lesbians and gay men as a political group. Many came out in order to affiliate with each other and become visible as a united and more powerful group for ‘the cause’ of homosexuality.

Despite the activities of gay movements, cultural shifts take time to be felt, and homosexuality was still considered a sickness. Legal changes in Canada in 1969, in the U.K. in 1967, and the Stonewall riots in 1969, were all events that contributed to homosexuals stepping ‘into the public arena. Thus for the first time [...] a social movement was led, not by sympathetic heterosexuals, or masked homosexuals, but by
self declared, self-accepting homosexuals’ (Lee, 1977:50). Eventually the social
movement achieved enough impact that homosexuality underwent major changes in
status, including the removal of homosexuality per se from the Diagnostic and

Partly as a result of this, by the 1970s psychology changed the way it theorised
homosexuality. Instead of lesbians and gay men being deemed sick, psychologists
became interested in creating models of ‘normal’ patterns of development for
homosexuality (see Chapter Three). In part through these models, ‘coming out’
became synonymous with a so called ‘normal’ pattern of ‘homosexual development’,
by both the psychology discipline, and the gay and lesbian community (e.g.,
McIntosh, 1968; Rasmussen, 2004; McLean, 2007). In turn, because dress and mannerisms can
be a useful and effective way to communicate sexuality and ‘out’ oneself, appearance
became an increasingly more important and acknowledged part of developing and
maintaining a lesbian or gay identity. However, bisexuality did not begin to feature
until the post-Stonewall era:

‘The word “bisexual” existed before Stonewall, and there were people who lived
as bisexuals [...] However the focus on bisexuality as a core aspect of one’s
identity does not seem to have arisen in any patterned way until after Stonewall.
(Post-Stonewall) bisexuality was not particularly problematised, though the only
people calling themselves bisexual at that point were swingers and free love
advocates’ (Udis-Kessler, 1995:19).

Bisexuality seems to have emerged as a social identity during the era of second-wave
feminism, which began to thrive as many lesbians left the gay movement (Plummer,
1999), because they did not wish to associate with men and felt frustrated with ‘gay
male sexism’ (Udis-Kessler, 1995:19).

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53 Although homosexuality itself was removed it was replaced by the category ‘ego-dysteric
homosexuality’.
Debates about appearance in the lesbian feminist movement

Feminism flourished in the 1970s/1980s, and the women’s movement became concerned with the ‘appropriateness’ of the butch-femme model (Faderman, 1991; Reilly & Lynch, 1990; Crawley, 2001), ‘especially radical feminism in which the feminist project is seen as the elimination of masculinity’ (Crawley, 2001:177).

Some lesbian feminists argued that feminism ought to reject all aspects of appearance that were linked to heterosexuality, masculinity, and the associated patriarchy (Creed, 1995; Faderman, 1991, Crawley, 2001; Levitt & Hiestand, 2005). Accordingly, radical lesbian feminists suggested that to be butch was now outdated (Weston, 1993), because it was hinged upon (a mimicry of) heterosexuality, and (an imitation of) masculinity (Weston, 1993; Levitt & Hiestand, 2005; Nguyen, 2008). Butch lesbians were accused of attempting to ‘access patriarchal privilege and power’ (Nguyen, 2008:665), and of aligning themselves with men through their appearance. In turn, butch was equated with the oppression of women, through their (assumed) masculine behaviour (Levitt & Hiestand, 2005; Nguyen, 2008).

Therefore, appearance was often about avoiding looking ‘like a man’. However, looking ‘too feminine’ was also contested, and the feminine, fashionable, female was considered a product of (and compliant with) male dominated patriarchy which, it was argued, enslaved and objectified women (Stein, 1992; Clark, 1993; Levitt & Hiestand, 2005). This resulted in second-wave feminists:

‘resisting dominant cultural definitions of female beauty and fashion as a way of separating themselves from heterosexual culture politically and as a way of signalling their lesbianism to other women in their subcultural group. This resistance to or reformulation of fashion codes distinguished lesbians from straight women at the same time that it challenged patriarchal structures’ (Clark, 1993:188).

Based on these debates, appearance became somewhat of ‘an obsession’ among some feminist communities (Faderman, 1991; Reilly & Lynch, 1990; Crawley, 2001). The uniform of the lesbian-feminist graduated into one of androgyny (Creed, 1995; Levitt & Hiestand, 2005), arguably a diluted version of the butch. The expectation was of short hair, jeans, flannel shirts and no make-up. Lesbians who did not conform to this look were frowned upon and their legitimacy as lesbians challenged (Creed, 1995).
This emergence of a required look provides an example of how appearance can become a mandate of group membership. However, it is worth noting these requirements became the expectation for all second wave feminists regardless of sexuality. Consequently a crossover occurred between heterosexual and lesbian women's 'looks' (Cottingham, 1996).

Within second-wave feminism, (appropriately gendered) appearance was not the only requirement in order to belong and be accepted. During the 1970s, the notion that 'the personal is political' began to be commonly discussed. Within feminist circles, lesbianism became associated with heroism and true commitment to feminist ideals. Some feminists questioned whether a woman could be committed to feminism if she was being oppressed by marriage to a man, the 'enemy' (Udis-Kessler, 1995). This created something nearing a 'lesbian imperative' within the women's rights movement. The intellectual debates that took place saw a shift away from essentialist theories of sexuality, towards the notion that women could choose to be lesbians (Kitzinger, 1987; Faderman, 1991), and that if they were loyal to feminism then they would do so. There was huge cultural pressure in some feminist circles to be a lesbian and disassociate from heterosexual life.

However, many (political) lesbians did not (secretly) stop being attracted to, or having sex with, men. They began to feel oppressed by a climate which in effect 'closeted' their attraction to men. Bisexuality in the U.S., during this period of the mid 1970s, had remained a non-political identity which was based around free love (Udis-Kessler, 1995). However, some of the women who had identified as lesbian, but found themselves still attracted to men, started to define themselves as bisexual. This signified a turning point for bisexuality, and by the mid 1980s many (political) bisexual groups were formed. These women of the lesbian feminist movement:

'ultimately became the leaders of the political bisexual movement: as they “came out” as bisexual; as they were castigated for doing so; as they reclaimed pride in their sexuality in ways taught to them, ironically, by lesbian-feminism and the gay movement' (Udis-Kessler, 1995:24).

If the earliest bisexual groups were formed by women who were heavily involved with lesbian feminism, then it seems logical that these bisexual women would have worn the androgynous 'uniform' of the lesbian-feminist movement. Therefore it seems most
likely that the first ‘wave’ of (political) bisexual women would not have stood out from other lesbian feminists of the time. However, this does offer insight into the possibilities for links between bisexuality and androgynous’ looking’.

**AIDs and the roots of queer politics**

Running parallel with second-wave feminism was the deeply significant arrival of the AIDs epidemic. The events around the AIDs epidemic had cumulative effects for conceptualisations of lesbian and gay identities. AIDs was first identified as an illness in 1980. It was originally termed ‘gay cancer’, then *Gay Related Immune Deficiency* (GRID), then in 1982 officially acquired the name *Auto Immune Deficiency Syndrome* (AIDS). The early years of the AIDs ‘epidemic’ have come to be associated by many with misinformation, hysteria, scaremongering, and mismanagement and inaction by governments and drugs companies in how they (ineffectively) addressed the AIDs crisis (Gage, Richards & Wilmot, 2002). In 1987 the activist group *Aids Coalition to Unleash Power* (ACT UP) was formed in New York (Gamson, 1989; Gage et al., 2002).

Much of ACT UP’s activism was based on protests against the aforementioned issues which they argued were oppressive for people with AIDs. The illness, it has been argued, was dealt with poorly because it was seen as the disease of gay men and drug users. AIDs came to be constructed on a moral basis, which held those who had the illness as responsible for their own ‘demise’ through their ‘deviant’ behaviour. This type of stigmatising discourse could be used to ‘excuse’ the inactivity and bureaucracy which delayed action, to either halt the spread, or aid the progress in the treatment of AIDs. Critically ACT UP challenged this construction of AIDs, partly in the language they used and partly through their direct action (Gamson, 1989).

ACT UP campaigned in a way that broke boundaries, and used strong imagery (see, for example, *Figure 2.18*) to draw attention to themselves as they protested against the simplistic links between AIDs and gay identity, highlighting that it was behaviours, not identities, at the root of the spread of AIDs. They were outrageous, noisy, raunchy and visible in their protests outside government offices and at public gatherings. Their

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54 Like the earlier Homophile Organisations, and despite having the aim of embracing diversity, most of ACT UP’s early members were white, middle class, professional gay men and lesbians, mostly in their twenties and thirties. ACT UP began in New York, but had ‘branches’ in other key U.S. cities (Gamson, 1989). ACT UP has at times had bisexual members, despite (or because of) the negative associations between AIDs and bisexuality (Udis-Kessler, 1996a).

55 They used terms such as ‘people with AIDs’ rather than ‘victims’, talked about ‘risk practices’ rather than ‘risk groups’ and so on (Gamson, 1989).
political campaigns asserted their identity unapologetically, while simultaneously challenging the stigmatisation of gay identity. This era signifies the earliest use of terms such as ‘we’re here, we’re queer, get used to it’ (Gamson, 1989). From 1988 the word ‘queer’ began to appear, representative of this ‘transgressive youth’, queer ‘captured a new generation’s energy and provided a strategy for radically transcending categories. It was a key symbolic marker event’ (Plummer, 1999:154-155).

Figure 2.18. ACT UP Silence Equals Death logo

Bisexuality gained further visibility during the early years of the AIDS epidemic. Bisexual people were branded carriers of the disease, contaminated by their ‘deviant’ same-sex behaviour, to then ‘pass the illness’ to the ‘innocent’ in their heterosexual relations (Gamson, 1989; Sturgis, 1996). There is much more that could be said about the 1980s and the impact of AIDS on lesbian and gay communities, however the key aspect for this chapter is the way in which the events of this decade saw a huge cultural shift in the visibility of lesbian, gay and, critically now also, queer and bisexual, politics, communities and lifestyles.

Lesbian and bisexual in/visibility in advertising and the media

The mid 1980s and early 1990s saw the consumer industry ‘cashing in’ on the commodity of sexuality (Clark, 1993; Plummer, 1999; Baker, 1997). In capitalist Britain, Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher’s conservative government advocated consumer growth and (as Plummer, 1999, has suggested, perhaps ironically under a right-wing Conservative government which valued ‘tradition’) this saw the rise of lesbian and gay consumer and commercial culture. This consumer rhetoric saw a turn towards ‘lifestyle’ (as the antithesis to ‘politics’) where ‘identity is now a matter of personal choice rather than political compulsion’ (Stein, 1992:436).
The realisation of (gay men’s) consumer market potential had been gradually developing over previous years. However, the potential of lesbians as a target market of consumers had previously failed to be identified, or even dismissed⁵⁶ (Sender, 2004), not least because lesbians were still associated with lesbian-feminism which had been hostile towards fashion and beauty (e.g., Stein, 1992; Clarke, 1993). Furthermore, there was a ‘risk’ in aiming a product at lesbian consumers, lest the product would become ‘associated with homosexuality and avoided by heterosexual consumers’ (Clark, 1993:187), of whom there were many more than there were lesbians.

However once lesbians became identified as having higher disposable incomes, particularly as they were less likely to have the cost and time limitations associated with children⁵⁷, they became the perfect consumer to appeal to. Moreover, younger lesbians were not necessarily endorsing the ‘anti-fashion’ of the 1970s and 1980s lesbian-feminist (e.g., Stein, 1992; Clark, 1993). By the early 1990s ‘lesbians’ as a social category became shaped by advertisers to create a ‘target market’ (Clark, 1993; Sender, 2004). This targeting of a lesbian market was not only instigated by advertisers, but was largely brought about by political activists who had worked (indeed struggled) to further liberate lesbians and gay men by increasing positive representations (Gluckman & Reed, 1997b; Ciasullo, 2001) of diverse sexualities in the mainstream:

‘Gay and lesbian political activists, who have toiled for decades at the grassroots level to promote a welcoming climate for gay men and lesbians, certainly deserve a large share of the credit for the proliferation of gay-positive images, both in ads and in other media’ (Gluckman & Reed, 1997b:3).

However, due to the necessity to appeal to lesbians without alienating heterosexual women, the imagery of lesbianism remained coded (Clark, 1993), so that mainstream advertising tended to be ‘generic rather than suggest a specifically lesbian theme’ (Sender, 2004:422). Consequently lesbian imagery was only (intended to be) visible to

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⁵⁶Besides, lesbians had not traditionally fitted the criteria required by the advertising industry (see, for example, Clarke, 1993, and Peñaloza, 1996, for detailed discussions of these criteria).

⁵⁷It is not always the case that lesbians and gay men do not have children. Many same-sex couples have a child/children from a previous heterosexual relationship, and it is becoming more common for (particularly lesbian) couples to foster, adopt, or use alternative forms of conception (see, for example, Rothblum, 1994a; Clarke, 2000; Naples, 2004; Clarke & Kitzinger, 2005, for discussions of lesbian and gay parenting).
those ‘in the know’ rather than to a wider audience (see, for example, images of dual advertising in magazines, Clark, 1993). The relevance of dual advertising for the appearance and visibility of lesbians lies in the resulting crossover that occurred between ‘lesbian’ and ‘heterosexual’ appearance. Heterosexual women, swayed by the fashion pages, began to look ‘like lesbians’:

‘fashion mimicry of the lesbian played out by women during the 1990s overlaps with the grunge aesthetic, and includes the donning of laced boots, including Doc Martens, Timberland work boots, and heavy combats; short and buzzed hair […] loose fitting plaid flannel shirts; and minimal or no jewelry or make-up’ (Cottingham, 1996:51).

Second, these dual advertisements of (mainly clothes) began to target lesbians. Young urban lesbians (encouraged by advertising) chose to invest in their appearance in the ‘traditional’ ways which lesbian feminists before them had so vehemently rejected (Clark, 1993). The result was that distinguishable lesbian looks became less distinct, and diversity in lesbian appearance increased (Clark, 1993; Cottingham, 1996). Lesbians were no longer under the same (political) pressures to fit in with their community through their appearance as they historically had been (Clark, 1993). Consequently the ‘lesbian woman’ no longer stood out from the ‘heterosexual woman’ as distinctly as before. As Stein (1992), has highlighted:

‘On the one hand, the new [versions of] lesbianism deconstructs the old, perhaps overly politicized or prescriptive notion of lesbianism by […] acknowledging internal group differences, and affirming the value of individual choice when it comes to style and political and sexual expression. On the other hand it comes perilously close to depoliticizing lesbian identity and perpetuating our invisibility by failing, frequently, to name itself to others’ (Stein, 1992:437).

The only sites where lesbian images could be aimed explicitly at a lesbian audience was within specifically lesbian media, which had emerged in the early 1990s and reflected (and embraced) the (consumer based) ‘lifestyle’ over ‘politics’ rhetoric. These magazines (e.g., Diva and Phase magazines in the U.K., Out, Girlfriends, and Curve magazines in the U.S.) included fashion pages, which previous lesbian and/or
feminist publications had not. In the main, these sources framed their fashion content around the newly emerged ‘lifestyle’ rhetoric, despite their inclusion of articles with political subject matter elsewhere in the magazines. Consequently, lesbian imagery in these magazines served to reiterate that appearance was about pleasure and consumption. This consumption required that there was ‘something’ to be consumed, or purchased. Therefore these magazines, like mainstream fashion, also contributed to the turn away from ‘anti-fashion’ or ‘anti-consumerism politics’ (Lewis, 1997:93-94). The turn to consumerism meant that lesbians became ‘allowed’ to invest in their appearance and take pleasure in how they looked. This was the roots of the ‘lipstick lesbian’ (who invested financial resources in the purchase of clothes, shoes, and make-up, hence the term) and lesbian ‘chic’ (e.g., Cottingham, 1996).

‘Lesbian and bisexual chic’

By the 1990s ‘lesbian chic’ (a similar concept to the ‘lipstick lesbian’) began to make a comeback, this time with multiple meanings, and far more visibly than in its 1920s manifestation. Perhaps what ‘launched’ lesbian chic was the August 1993 edition of Vanity Fair magazine (see Figure 2.19). The ‘front cover – which featured k.d. lang being shaved by (heterosexual) supermodel Cindy Crawford – became an internationally recognized symbol of the phenomenon of ‘lesbian chic’ (Ciasullo, 2001; Hamer & Budge, 1994a:1).

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58 In *Diva* magazine fashion ‘spreads’ provoked reactions from readers with regard to: ‘the non-representativeness of the models; the problems of objectification; the apparent unsuitability of the clothes featured for accepted/stereotypical/easily recognizable lesbian styles; and the cost of the clothes’ (Lewis, 1997). The fact that readers complained reflects how crucial appearance is in defining lesbian identities and communities.
Figure 2.19. Cover of Vanity Fair magazine, August, 1993

The Vanity Fair cover was the culmination of a gradual increase in references in mainstream media to lesbianism. These included events such as k.d. lang outing herself as a lesbian in 1992, followed soon after by U.S. singer/song-writer Melissa Etheridge in 1993, as well as allusions to lesbians and lesbian history in British music, film and television (for example in historical dramas and soap operas) (Hamer & Budge, 1994a). This inclusion and visibility was important for lesbians because popular culture provides 'a site where meanings can be contested, and where dominant ideologies can be disturbed' (Hamer & Budge, 1994:2).

One dominant ideology which was disrupted in the 1990s, was that for lesbians with media careers, there was a significant cultural shift away from lesbianism as stigmatised. In the past to have your sexuality called into question would have

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59 Although lesbian characters were visible and did appear in the mainstream in the early 1990s they also tended to 'disappear' again rather rapidly. Cottingham (1996) wrote during this time that lesbians had an 'absent presence' and stated that, 'mainstream film and television narratives tend to follow one or more of the three primary plot lines established for them [lesbians]: (1) get heterosexualised; (2) get incarcerated; and (3) die [...] or she can unexpectedly disappear [...] without any explanation' (1996:32-33).
damaged your career, now it would seem that it was more likely that it would boost it (Hamer & Budge, 1994a; Stein, 1994), and ‘it looked like the previously padlocked pop-cultural closet had swung wide open’ (Gluckman & Reed, 1997a:xvii). For lesbians then, this cultural shift signified increased lesbian visibility in media sites such as television and music, which created a more welcoming environment for lesbians to ‘come out’ (Stein, 1994; Gill, 2009). Lesbian appearance, and its associated visibility, allowed lesbians to have ‘role models’, or icons, who validated their sexuality. It has been suggested that:

‘Initially, lesbian chic held the promise of putting lesbians front and center in both public and political life: finally some recognition and an image facelift, a long-awaited celebration of our good looks, style, and even marketability. The publicity had real appeal to lesbians, promising a kind of revolutionary cultural presence and endurance. No more being the drab sisters on the sidelines of gay pride or the embarrassing cousin of the feminist movement’ (Schorb & Hammidi, 2000:259).

Instead of ‘lesbian looks’ being rooted in politically based organisations and communities, they were instead based in the popular culture, which, initially at least, allowed for a greater diversity of lesbian looks to become both available and accepted. But while (some) lesbian artists were feeling more able to come out and appear to the world, what of bisexual appearance and visibility in the media? In the past some bisexual artists had felt unable to come out. In the 1970s singer Holly Near had chosen to hide her bisexuality in order to maintain allegiance with lesbian feminism (Stein, 1994), hence recognising the ‘risk’ of being out as bisexual. In the ‘welcoming’ 1990s ‘out’ U.S. bisexual singer Ani DiFranco used the lyrics of her song In or Out (1992) in order to ‘expose the pressure she frequently received to be either straight or gay, and her refusal to give in to it’ (Marti, 2004). It has also been stated that she ‘alienated’ lesbian fans when she married a man in 1998 (Marti, 2004).

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60 For example singers such as U.K. pop singer Dusty Springfield and U.S. singer-songwriter Tracy Chapman felt an impact on their careers when their sexuality was called into question (Hamer & Budge, 1994a).
The visible femme and the invisible butch

Representations of lesbianism in TV, film, and advertising have gone beyond just an ‘acceptance’ of diverse lesbian sexuality:

‘To be sure, representation promises visibility, but visibility means not only that one is present but that one is being watched. It also means that certain images get singled out as watchable’ (Ciasullo, 2001:584, emphasis in original).

It has been put forward that what was ‘singled out’ by the media and advertising is a version of (so-called) lesbian appearance referred to as the ‘hot’ (Gill, 2009), or ‘luscious’ lesbian (Ciasullo, 2001; Gill, 2009). This marked a significant change in lesbian image, because it meant that a ‘femme’ version of lesbian appearance materialised and became visible within popular culture:

‘The figure of the ‘lusurious lesbian’ [...] is notable for her extraordinarily attractive, conventionally feminine appearance. Women depicted in this way are almost always slim yet curvaceous, flawlessly made up and beautiful’ (Gill, 2009:151).

This femme look was attractive to heterosexual men, because these women held what has been termed the “I know but” equation (Ciasullo, 2001:592): attractive lesbians are ‘so attractive’ that they surely can’t be lesbians really and therefore might be (sexually) ‘available’. This turns the table on ‘traditional’ understandings of butch as the visible manifestation of lesbian identity. Instead the butch lesbian was erased from the picture entirely (Ciasullo, 2001; Gill, 2009), or watered down to an accessible version of the (tom)boyish butch (e.g., Shane from The L Word, which after all was aiming to attract the ‘dual’ audience of heterosexual and lesbian viewers). Lesbian ‘chic’ and ‘lipstick lesbian’ identities are still a matter of social class: the middle class in/visible femme lesbian is most often the body on display, whereas the working class butch lesbian is the version that is erased (Ciasullo, 2001). Furthermore, political identity is also annihilated by lesbian chic because ‘those excluded are precisely those with visibility in establishing lesbianism as a political identity: women who reject a traditionally feminine presentation’ (Gill, 2009:152). For lesbians then, ultimately lesbian chic makes lesbians ‘accessible’ to the heterosexual man. This is mirrored in how bisexuality is represented within the discourse of lesbian chic, and it is to bisexuality that I now turn.
An exploration of the impact of lesbian chic on bisexuality

Wilkinson (1996a) has argued that bisexuality was actively ‘marketed’ to both lesbians and heterosexual women during this era. It became trendy and fashionable for heterosexual women to engage in sex with women as secondary to their primary relations with men (‘weekend lesbianism’). Images of heterosexual women engaging in same-sex behaviours was (and is) visible in the media. Madonna perhaps epitomised the notion of ‘lesbian/bisexual chic’, and she may have contributed to the rise in its (media) popularity. In the late 1980s it was alleged that Madonna was in a relationship with U.S. (bisexual) comedian Sandra Bernhard, although in more recent years Bernhard has stated that they were only ‘playing’ to the press (Wood, 2002; Saban, 2007). This is exactly what the ‘weekend lesbianism’ version of bisexuality is said to be about:

‘the public could be teased with the possibility of lesbianism, which provoked both curiosity and titillation. Hollywood [and the media] marketed the suggestion of lesbianism, not because it intentionally sought to address lesbian audiences, but because it sought to address male voyeuristic interests (Weiss, 1992:32-33, quoted in Cottingham, 1996:42).

It would seem that 1990s disturbance of dominant ideologies allowed bisexuality to finally become visible. However, bisexuality’s first taste of visibility actually deemed it more invisible:

‘The "new" bisexuality also, paradoxically, reinforces the old idea that there are "essentially" two sexual identities: lesbian and straight. [...] the notion of "essential" sexual orientations provides a safety-net for heterosexual women who occasionally have sex with women: They remain certain that they are "heterosexual really," returning securely to the arms of their men after a little lesbian "fun." (Wilkinson, 1996a:294).

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61 It was also considered ‘transgressive’ for lesbians to engage in sex with men. This depoliticised lesbian sexuality as it relegated ‘old school’ (political and serious) lesbians as out of fashion, and the new fun loving ‘lipstick lesbian’ as very much in vogue (Wilkinson, 1996a).

62 Bernhard was not Madonna’s only brush with ‘bisexuality’: she had utilised ‘lesbian’ imagery into her music and videos of the 1990s (Hamer & Budge, 1994a), and her brother has suggested that she had a long-term liaison with Bernhard’s (ex) girlfriend (but he does not know if the relationship was sexual) (Ciccone, 2008).
Bisexuality is represented as an inauthentic and temporary version of lesbianism, which is 'really' just heterosexual women having fun, hence bisexual women do not exist at all. In 2003, Madonna famously kissed Britney Spears and Christina Aguilera at the Music Television (MTV) awards (Moss, 2003) (see, Figure 2.20), an event which evoked much media reaction (Thompson, 2006). Madonna has hinted at lesbianism/bisexuality, but has never explicitly stated that she is bisexual, and nor has she needed to; this element of her image is 'titilating', and maintains her availability to men. No particular appearance became associated with bisexuality, because the only link that might be made is that bisexual women might look 'just like' heterosexual woman (as this is how they are ultimately presented). This trend of women hinting at lesbianism without any need to disrupt their underlying heterosexuality has endured:

'Young women exposed to mainstream media outlets are seeing expressions of same-sex desire between women much more frequently than ever before. However, mainstream images of same-sex desire between women are very specific, meaning they are often of hyper-feminine women ("lipstick lesbians"). Explicit images among attractive, feminine, "heterosexual-looking" women in particular cater to heterosexual male fantasy' (Thompson, 2006:55).

Figure 2.20. Image of Madonna and Britney kissing at the 2003 MTV awards
Lesbian/bisexual chic has prevailed from the 1990s to the 21st century. In 2008 U.S. singer Katy Perry released a single titled *I kissed a girl*. The lyrics include the words:

> 'I kissed a girl and I liked it [...] I kissed a girl just to try it, I hope my boyfriend don’t mind it. It felt so wrong, it felt so right, don’t mean I’m in love tonight [...] No, I don’t even know your name, it doesn’t matter, you’re just my experimental game [...] It's not what good girls do, not how they should behave'.

These lyrics offer her audience a story of experimental fun which need not disrupt her heterosexual relationship or identity. Once again same-sex behaviours are positioned as fun, temporary, and ‘naughty’ but devoid of commitment, and therefore not to be sustained or taken seriously. Bisexual/lesbian chic is visible not only in mainstream contexts, but also within lesbian specific sources. Consider for example this extract from *Diva* magazine in which U.K. pop singer and (heterosexual) celebrity Lily Allen discusses her lesbian thoughts and ‘experience’:

> "'I did once snog these twins in San Diego" she remembers, giggling. [...] "I had them both and I was dancing and shoving my arse on one of them and one on my front bottom" [...] Clearly concerned that this brush with incestuous lesbianism isn’t juicy enough, she adds, “That’s the only time ... but I do have wet lesbian dreams quite a lot”’ (Strudwick, 2009).

The impact of celebrities ‘playing’ bisexual chic is that bisexuality cannot exist as a ‘true’ identity in the eyes of the media:

> 'examples of celebrities and reality TV stars claiming a bisexual identity are often responded to dismissively by the press, with the use of phrases such as “bi-curiosity” and accusations that they are just being fashionable, or doing so for publicity purposes (which is of course possible)’ (Barker, Bowes-Catton, Iantaffi, Cassidy & Brewer, 2008).

In sum, within mainstream western culture over the last twenty years, there have been a range of understandings of bisexual and lesbian appearance and their

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63 Married to male celebrity Russell Brand, it seems that Katy Perry is keeping quiet about her own sexuality, although Internet sources demonstrate that many people have discussed her sexuality, and questioned whether she is bisexual.

associated identities. Butch looks have been diluted or erased entirely. Meanwhile (extremely) femme lesbian looks, and (a version of) bisexuality have appeared and been made visible, only for them to be almost immediately invisibilised again, absorbed by the vacuum of heterosexuality and heterosexual femininity. As bisexual author Sue George writes on her blog:

‘Megan Fox, Lady Gaga, Katy Perry, et al all the way back to Madonna c1990... well, they may be bi, or they may not. They may have felt a sudden desire to be, like, totally honest with their public at this particular moment in time, or they may have seen a marketing opportunity. Celebrities, eh. You just can’t trust them/their public images/their people. And they do real bi women no favours at all. [...] The supposition remains [...] bi women = really straight’ (George, 2009).

Although a particular version of bisexuality had now become visible in the mainstream media, it had not become associated with a distinct appearance: instead it is understood as a version of heterosexuality marketed to heterosexual men. This brings us full circle back to in/visible lesbians, and entirely invisible bisexuals. These concepts are explored in more depth in the next chapter which explores conceptualisations of bisexual identity.

In this chapter I have chronicled the history and development of appearance norms, which has shown that appearance has always been, and remains, of great importance as part of lesbian (and gay) individual and collective identities. Broadly speaking, recognition enabled lesbians (and gay men) to form communities, which were supportive environments, where sanctuary from the stigmatisation of mainstream society could be sought. Through strategically considering matters of appearance, lesbians and gay men were able to draw upon shared visual identities in order to become visible, and use this visibility for political gain as part of their fight to overcome oppression and demand ‘equal rights’. However, in contrast, bisexual people have been largely invisible, and a picture of a bisexual visual history, and bisexual visual identity, is far harder to identify.
Chapter Three: Everyone and everywhere, or no one and nowhere: Two hundred years of conceptualising bisexuality

Introduction

The previous chapter drew upon a range of sources to provide both an historical, and a contemporary account, of the importance of appearance and visibility for lesbians and gay men. However, when tracing the links between sexuality and appearance, it became apparent that bisexuality has often been literally invisible within mainstream society, and within gay and lesbian communities. Whereas appearance norms for lesbians and gay men have functioned in a variety of ways, there have been no distinct appearance norms for bisexual people, and therefore no possibility of bisexual visual identities.

In this chapter, I focus specifically on theories of, and research into, bisexuality. In order to research bisexual women’s visual identities, it is critical to first understand the ways in which bisexuality has been, and continues to be, conceptualised. This chapter serves three key purposes within this thesis. The first is to introduce and define the concept of bisexuality, and understand what the word ‘bisexual’ has meant within (mainly) academic sources over the last two hundred years. The second purpose is to critically analyse these understandings of bisexuality. In doing so I demonstrate that contemporary, sexological, psychological, sociological, and scientific accounts, have understood bisexuality in such a way that it has been made conceptually invisible. When bisexuality has had a presence, it has been portrayed negatively. The theme which runs through both contemporary and historical academic literature is of bisexuality as dismissed, stigmatised, marginalised, and invisible. The third and final purpose of this chapter is to highlight more recent affirmative literature on bisexuality which has attempted to clarify understandings, and challenged the traditional dismissal and marginalisation of bisexual people and their identity within the social sciences.
An overview of dominant understandings of bisexuality

When debating with her partner about what bisexual identity means, Farryington (2008) asked:

‘Does it involve love or is it only about sex? Do serial partners of both sexes count, or do they have to be simultaneous? Are fantasies about sexual relations with both men and women sufficient, or does one have to act on both impulses? All the theories and stereotypes also came out in the course of our discussion: that bisexuals are sex fiends who’ll sleep with anything that moves; that they’re unable to commit to a sexual identity; that bisexuality doesn’t really exist but serves as a hedge for semi-closeted gay men and sexually adventuresome straight women. That last one reminded us of an old joke: “Bisexual men and bisexual women have one thing in common. They’ll both be having sex with men five years from now.” (Farryington, 2008:267).

I use her quote as a springboard to introduce this overview of dominant (negative) conceptualisations of bisexuality within academia and wider western culture. Within both heterosexual mainstream society, and lesbian and gay communities, bisexuality is often viewed negatively. These constructions take multiple forms, which are encapsulated in terms or understandings such as ‘Switch-hitter. Swings both ways. Fence-sitter. [...] having your cake and eating it, too [...] promiscuity, immaturity, or wishy-washiness. To some lesbians and gay men it says “passing”, “false consciousness,” and a desire for “heterosexual privilege”’ (Garber, 1995/2000:37-40). What these understandings have in common is a theme of discrediting and dismissing the existence, or credibility, of bisexual identity, which serves to render it either stigmatised, or completely non-existent and therefore invisible.

Heteronormative western society dictates that what is ‘normal’ is to be attracted to, and have relationships with, only the ‘opposite’ sex or gender (e.g., Katz, 1995; Dyer, 1997; Jackson, 2006). Gay and lesbian identities are disruptive to heteronormative understandings, because gay men and lesbians are (widely understood to be) attracted to, and have relationships with, only the ‘same’ sex. However, what both heterosexual and homosexual relationships are underpinned by is ‘single’ (same or opposite) sex attraction. In recent years the term ‘mononormative’ has been coined, to describe the privileging of relationships with only one gender, which in turn
devalues bisexuality and non-monogamous and polyamorous relationships (see, for example, Klesse, 2006; Ritchie & Barker, 2005; 2006; Yep, 2008). What underpins much of the negativity about bisexuality, and bisexual people that I discuss in this chapter, is the assumption of monosexuality, and monosexism (Namaste, 1996b). Attraction towards (as well as relationships with) only one gender is taken for granted within patriarchal society, and is seemingly the only ‘valid’ option (Hemmings, 2002; Petford, 2003; Fish, 2006). Therefore, the privileging of attraction to (as well as relationships with) only one gender, leads to the dismissal of ‘both’ sex attraction, and therefore of bisexuality (Namaste, 1996b; Rust, 2000; Petford, 2003; Clarke & Peel, 2007b).

What is clearly apparent within academia and wider cultural sources is the notion of the ‘unreality of bisexuality’, whereby if bisexuality is even acknowledged, then it is rapidly dismissed, as an attention seeking strategy, or a passing phase, but often it is simply not seen at all. The implication is that no one is really bisexual, and that bisexuality is nowhere. The numerous guises of non-existent bisexuality serve to omit, overlook, invalidate and invisibilise bisexuality and bisexual people (Garber, 1995/2000; Angelides, 2001; MacDowall, 2009).

In the first version of ‘non-existence’ bisexuality is perceived as an attention seeking strategy by women, as outlined and exampled in Chapter Two. Through mainstream mass media representations in particular, bisexual women are positioned as really heterosexual. They kiss other girls, or ‘claim’ to be bisexual, purely to seek the attention of heterosexual men (Thompson, 2006; Diamond, 2005a; Barker, Bowes-Catton, Iantaffi, Cassidy & Brewer, 2008; Fairington, 2008). This formulation of bisexuality is termed ‘bisexuality a la mode’ (Wilkinson, 1996a), or ‘heteroflexibility’ (Diamond, 2005b), or ‘weekend lesbianism’ where bisexuality is performed purely for fun, or as a fashion statement (Wilkinson, 1996a).

In the second version of ‘non-existence’ bisexuality is posited as a temporary or “passing” phase, during which time bisexual people are ‘failing’ to commit to being either ‘straight’ or ‘gay’65 (e.g., Hansen & Evans, 1985; Shuster, 1987; Rust, 1995;
Parker, Adams & Phillips, 2007; Diamond, 2008; McLean, 2008b; Fairyington, 2008).

The only reason they are identifying as bisexual is that they are too immature to have realised their ‘true’ identity, or to have ‘made up their minds’ about their sexuality (Petford, 2003; Ault, 1996a; 1996b; McLean, 2008b). Until they do so, bisexual people are understood to be emotionally immature, psychologically disturbed, or confused, as they allegedly flounder between straight and gay (Zinik, 1985; McLean, 2008b; Morrison, Harrington & McDermott, 2010). These understandings have even led to accusations that bisexual people are delusional in their belief that they are bisexual (Shuster, 1987; Ault, 1996a), particularly from some lesbian feminist communities (Rust, 1995; Ault, 1996a). When bisexuality is understood as a temporary transition between heterosexual and homosexual, the expectation is that the bisexual individual will eventually realise that they are either ‘really heterosexual’ or ‘really homosexual’ (Zinik, 1985; Hemmings, 1993; Rust, 1995; Diamond, 2008). In this understanding bisexual identity is completely invalidated as a genuine or permanent position. The bisexual individual will eventually effectively disappear, once they become subsumed within homosexuality or heterosexuality.

Another version of non-existence is in the invisibility of bisexuality within some recent mainstream mass media TV programmes, such as the U.S. produced Buffy the Vampire Slayer, and British soap operas such as Coronation Street and EastEnders, where the possibility of bisexuality is overlooked or unnamed:

‘F]ictional characters tend to be presented as straight if in a relationship with someone of the “opposite sex,” and gay if in a relationship with someone of the “same sex.” If someone becomes attracted to a person of a different gender to the one he or she was before, that someone is portrayed as changing from straight to gay (or vice versa)” (Barker et al., 2008:145).

Similarly, there is an overlooking of bisexuality within contemporary popular understandings. Celebrities such as U.S. actress, singer, and model Lindsay Lohan, who have engaged in a same-sex relationship, but have a mainly heterosexual history are assumed to now be gay, rather than the possibility of bisexuality being considered, regardless of how they identify their own sexuality (McLean, 2008b). More recently, some celebrities have self-identified as bisexual. Those who gain media attention as a some lesbian communities identifying as bisexual for any period of time is seen as ‘selling out’) (McLean, 2008a).
result of their public declarations tend to be women, for example, U.S. pop singer Lady Gaga, and U.S. actress Angelina Jolie. There is a potential for increased bisexual visibility through their celebrity status66, but this has remained unfulfilled, because instead, through media interpretations of them, stereotypes of bisexuality (e.g., as an attention seeking strategy) are exacerbated. To date, any hope that bisexual celebrity status might be a strategy in overcoming the erasure and invisibility of bisexual people and their sexuality has not come to fruition (Capulet, 2010).

Bisexual people can feel under pressure (stemming from the cultural understanding that the only viable sexual identities are the monosexual options of ‘homosexual’ or ‘heterosexual’) to ‘choose a side’. This is because binary models of sexuality, and negative understandings of bisexuality, have led to a broad cultural understanding that bisexuality is ‘neither a valid nor acceptable sexual identity, and these constructions contribute to the oppression of bisexual men and women’ (McLean, 2008b:159). This type of perception gives rise to the expressions ‘bi now, gay later’ (Ault, 1996a:314; Morrison et al., 2010), and ‘gay, straight, or lying’ (e.g., Fahs, 2009). Other derogatory cultural terms which position bisexuality as temporary are ‘lesbian until graduation’ (LUGs) (e.g., Diamond, 2003) or ‘bisexual until graduation’ (e.g., Fahs, 2009), which refer to women who identify as lesbian or bisexual temporarily, until they leave university and ‘drop’ the identity. Similarly, if women identify as lesbians, and then have a relationship with a man, they may find themselves labelled ‘hasbians’, a combination of ‘has been’ and ‘lesbian’ (Rothblum, 1994b; Storr, 1999b).

Once a bisexual person ‘realises’ that they are straight or gay, their bisexual identity can be located in the past, as a part of the ‘coming out’ process. In the meantime, while they identify as bisexual, they are greedily gulping down heterosexual privilege (Zinik, 1985; Shuster, 1987; Eadie, 1993; Rust, 1995; Garber, 1995/2000; Hemmings, 2002), and using lesbians or gay men purely for sexual fun (Wilkinson, 1996a). By wanting the pleasure of ‘same-sex’ encounters, without the hard work and associated stigma of being ‘out’ as gay or lesbian, the bisexual is seen as cowardly and as ‘copping out’ of being ‘out’ (Zinik, 1985; Rust, 1995; Hemmings, 2002). This absorption of

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66 Many celebrities embrace their public status to engage with a range of political issues (sometimes LGBTQ specific, for example in speaking out against lesbian and gay ‘don’t ask, don’t tell’ policies, or against same-sex marriage discrimination). However, bisexual celebrities have yet to do so: ‘None of these celebrities has so much as issued a press release, publicly lobbied or even marched alongside a group of bisexuals’ (Capulet, 2010:295).
heterosexual privilege, while still wishing to be part of gay and lesbian communities, is one of the ways in which the ‘greedy’ bisexual is accused of ‘having their cake and eating it too’ (Zinik, 1985; Spalding & Peplau, 1997).

Bisexual people are also associated with notions of greed through the assumption of promiscuity that is often associated with bisexuality (Hansen & Evans, 1985; Zinik, 1985; Shuster, 1987; Rust, 1995; McLean, 2008b). This is underpinned by the notion that because bisexual people are attracted to both men and women, they will therefore be obsessed with sex (Eliason, 1997; 2001; Israel & Mohr, 2004; Morrison et al., 2010), unable to live without engaging in sexual behaviour with both genders at all times (Morrison et al., 2010).

A further implication arising from this is that bisexual people will not be able to commit to a monogamous relationship with one person of one gender, a belief about bisexuals which has been suggested by both heterosexual people, and lesbians and gay men (Zinik, 1985; Shuster, 1987; Rust, 1995; Spalding & Peplau, 1997; Fairyington, 2008; Morrison et al., 2010). This too is underpinned by an assumption that bisexual people have a requirement for sex with both genders, as opposed to a potential for sex with either gender (Israel & Mohr, 2004). Therefore, bisexuals cannot be content with one partner, and instead will allegedly always be craving sex with the ‘other’ gender. Additionally, because ‘greedy bisexuals’ have an insatiable sexual appetite, they are also understood to be interested in sex with ‘anything that moves’67 (e.g., Israel & Mohr, 2004, Fairyington, 2008). Because they are considered unscrupulous about who they have sex with, they are also ‘seen as romantically fickle’ (Spalding & Peplau, 1997:612). For these reasons, bisexual people are understood to be incapable of monogamy, and expected to inevitably cheat on their partners (Rust, 1995; Spalding & Peplau, 1997; McLean, 2008b; Morrison et al., 2010).

The notion of the ‘kinky bisexual’ stems partly from the notion of the promiscuous bisexual, where bisexual people are understood to be not only sex obsessed, but also sexually adventurous through their alleged non-monogamous behaviour (Spalding & Peplau, 1997; McLean, 2008b). This understanding may also become (inadvertently)

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67 In the U.S. there is a magazine for bisexual people, titled Anything that Moves (Harper & Schneider, 2003; Israel & Mohr, 2004). Their choice of title demonstrates a light hearted and humorous reappropriation and reclamation of the term (Israel & Mohr, 2004).
perpetuated when bisexual activists challenge ‘traditional’ understandings of relationships and sexual practice because within the bisexual activist movement:

‘there is an openness about trans and BDSM (bondage and discipline, domination and submission and sadomasochism) issues. There is also an openness about having multiple partners in open, honest and loving relationships – polyamory’ (Barker & Yockney, 2004:119).

Bisexual individuals who engage in concurrent relationships with multiple partners do not fit within western culture’s dominant version of monogamous relationship norms. Mainstream mass media and popular culture more broadly, have privileged the idea of people finding one partner, and then staying with them forever (Ritchie & Barker, 2006). It has been argued that these monogamous discourses (and mononormative understandings) serve to maintain hegemonic dominant understanding of relationships, which in turn constrain and stigmatise those people who fall outside of them (Ritchie & Barker, 2005; 2006; Barker & Langdridge, 2010). Openly non-monogamous relationships (sometimes termed ‘polyamorous’ or ‘poly’) do not fit within dominant theories of love and attraction (Barker, 2005; 2006; Barker & Langdridge, 2010), and instead such relationships have only negative connotations such as dishonesty, infidelity, or even neuroticism and pathology (Barker, 2006; Ritchie & Barker, 2006; Barker & Ritchie, 2007; Barker & Langdridge, 2010).

In turn, these characteristics may be attributed to bisexual people because they are assumed to be (and sometimes are) non-monogamous. Films such as Basic Instinct (1992) have portrayed bisexual women as promiscuous murderers, with insatiable sexual desires (see, for example, White, 2002; Finlay & Fenton, 2005). This provides an example of how the promiscuity ‘model’ can also be taken one step further: through it bisexual people become understood to privilege sex (and sexual relationships) over emotions (and emotional relationships), which in turn contributes to the creation of the bisexual person as highly sexed (Barker, 2006; Fairifyington, 2008). This ‘highly-sexed’ model of non-monogamous bisexual people demonises them further (Barker, 2006) and feeds into the notion of the ‘dangerous bisexual’ (most often men) who

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68 Polyamory is a particular type of non-monogamy, and has been embraced as a term which indicates open, honest and multiple romantic and/or sexual relationships, in an attempt by poly people to disassociate from the negative connotations of ‘non-monogamy’ (Ritchie & Barker, 2006).
spreads HIV/AIDS and other diseases from the (deviant) gay community to the (pure and innocent) heterosexual world (Gamson, 1989). In this version of bisexuality, the non-monogamous bisexual is held responsible for spreading disease. Consequently bisexuality is conceived of as a dangerous identity position (Gamson, 1989; Sturgis, 1996; Spalding & Peplau, 1997; White, 2002). These negative conceptualisations of bisexuality may both underpin, and perpetuate ‘biphobia’, which I specifically discuss in Chapter Six.

I turn now to historical literature in order to illustrate that the roots of many of these (mis)conceptualisations of bisexuality can be found in the academic understandings that have developed over the last two-hundred years. The history of sexology has a dynamic relationship with the present (Brennan & Hegarty, 2007), because contemporary theories develop from, and are informed by, historical understandings.

A bisexual history

As authors of key titles on bisexuality acknowledge, and as will become apparent, bisexuality is often positioned as a problematic and complex identity (e.g., Angelides, 2001; Storr, 1999a; Firestein, 1996). In particular, bisexuality has proved problematic for researchers, because they have struggled to make it fit easily within the binary discourse created by early sexologists. Therefore bisexuality has been pushed to the sidelines, as sexologists and psychologists have seemed uncertain of what ‘to do’ with it. I critique the sources which I draw upon, to show the ways in which this has led to bisexuality being overlooked or invalidated by sexologists, psychologists, and social scientists more widely.

Sexology from 1800 - 1980

Early Sexology

The meaning of ‘bisexual’

The origins of the early use of the term bisexuality are somewhat ambiguous. It has been suggested that Coleridge, an English poet, used the term as early as 1804 to mean someone ‘containing both sexes in one body’ (Bristow, 1997:4). Early use of the term positioned bisexuality as a primitive state, called primordial bisexuality, which was understood to be the evolutionary underpinnings of all humans (Bristow, 1997).
Same-sex attraction was not something which defined an individual’s ‘identity’. The concepts which were understood were ‘masculinity’ and ‘femininity’ within the individual, and who someone were attracted to was perceived as only an incidental factor (Terry, 1999; Oosterhuis, 2000; Angelides 2001). Therefore, early use and understanding of the word ‘bisexuality’ (or ‘psychic hermaphroditism’ as it was sometimes known) was as a third gender, rather than a sexual identity (Oosterhuis, 2000). A bisexual person was someone with both male and female characteristics; ‘two biological sexes within a species, or [...] the coincidence of male and female characteristics within a single body’ (Storr, 1999a:15).

Third gender and gender inversion theories

The theory that German lawyer, and early homosexual activist, Karl Heinrich Ulrichs (1825-1895) is most noted for is ‘uranism’, or the theory of the ‘third sex’. During early stages of development human embryos are essentially hermaphrodites as their sexual organs are not differentiated (Kennedy, 1981). Ulrichs suggested that during foetal development a division took place that resulted in men, women and a ‘third sex’ (Bullough, 1994). For Ulrichs this third sex theory provided the explanation of homosexuality. This third sex was portrayed as neither really male, nor really female, and included those who would now be termed ‘homosexual’.

Those who fell within the third sex were ‘gender inverts’ because of the ‘effect of a form of congenital degeneration whereby the vita sexualis, or procreative sex instinct, was thought to be inverted’ (Angelides, 2001:36). It was not only the sexual instinct of the third gender that was inverted; a homosexual man was thought to be a female mind/soul trapped in a male body, and a homosexual woman a male mind/soul trapped in a female body (Weeks, 1989; Fairleyngton, 2008):

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69In early sex research the terms ‘psychic/physic hermaphrodite’ and ‘bisexual’ are in some ways interlinked and at times interchangeable. Eventually as the term psychic hermaphroditism began to disappear from use so did the sexual dimorphic understandings of bisexuality (Storr, 1999a:16).

70Ulrichs was a lawyer, whose interest in sexology stemmed from his experiences of negative reactions to his own attraction to men. Consequently, his writings were largely in defence of homosexuality (Oosterhuis, 2000). His work stemmed from theories of animal magnetism, physiology, mythology and literature, as well as his own personal beliefs, and he was a key figure in establishing formal research around sex and sexuality (Bullough, 1994).

71Notions of homosexuality as ‘gender inversion’ are echoed in modern day cultural understandings of sexuality, for example, in understandings of ‘butch’ lesbians and ‘effeminate’ gay men, as discussed in more depth in Chapters One, Two, and Nine.
'[Ulrichs] accepted without question the idea that love directed towards a man must be a woman’s love, and he saw it as a confirmation of his theory that he could detect “feminine” traits in himself and other homosexual males (for example, gestures, manner of walking, love of bright colours)’ (Kennedy, 1981:106).

Taking terminology from Plato, Ulrichs created his own terms. He called ‘normal’ masculine heterosexual men ‘dioning’ and ‘normal’ feminine heterosexual women ‘dioningin’. Homosexual men were termed ‘urnings’ and homosexual women ‘urningin’ (Kennedy, 1981; Bullough, 1994).

Initially his theory had no explanation for those who engaged in both ‘same’ and ‘opposite’ sex behaviour, because the idea of the feminine man and masculine woman as ‘homosexual’ could not explain those who did not fit within this dichotomy. However, Ulrichs later incorporated ‘bisexuality’ into this theory (Bristow, 1997), when he realised that there was more variation within his category of the third sex than he had first thought. Therefore, to try and encapsulate variety beyond his dichotomous model, he developed an expansive nomenclature for those who belonged in the ‘third sex’.

This included two types of ‘bisexual’ men: ‘conjunctive uranodinions’ (who had tender and passionate feelings towards males) and ‘disjunctive uranodinions’ (who had tender feelings towards males, but whose passionate feelings were only towards females). These were based on the idea that there were ‘sex-drive germs in the embryo, one for tender love and one for passionate love, the direction of each being separated’ (Kennedy, 1981:107). However, in his attempt to incorporate all the possibilities for the varieties of physical hermaphrodites, the theory seemed ready to collapse under the weight of its own complexities (Kennedy, 1981:107). However, Ulrichs distributed his writings to professionals, and his ideas of a ‘third sex’ category, and of hermaphroditism as the root of all sexuality, were adopted and elaborated upon by later researchers (Kennedy, 1981; Bullough, 1994; Oosterhuis, 2000).

72 This perhaps demonstrates how early sexologists, who themselves established the binary (homosexual and heterosexual) systems, could not easily accommodate bisexuality into their theories. Psychologists have continued to find it problematic to locate bisexuality within ‘any of the general categorical schemes for thinking about sexuality’ (Young-Bruehl, 2001:180).
Ulrich's third gender theory is an important influence, and is the first place in which the term ‘psychic/physical hermaphrodite’ is understood to refer to attraction to men and women. Particularly notably, Ulrichs’ writings caught the attention of German-Austrian psychiatrist and sex researcher Richard von Krafft-Ebing (1840-1902). Both Krafft-Ebing’s case studies, and the subsequent work of British physician and sex researcher Henry Havelock Ellis (1859-1939), show that by the early nineteenth century the term psychic hermaphrodite has been extended to have two meanings: 1) someone with the characteristics of both males and females, and 2) someone who experiences sexual attraction to both males and females.

Like Ulrichs, Krafft-Ebing considered homosexuality to be a matter of inverted masculinity and femininity (Terry, 1999; Angelides, 2001), which included the physicality of the inverted individual. Based on models of ‘normal masculine’ masculinity and ‘normal feminine’ femininity, inverts were understood to be ‘masculine women’ or ‘effeminate men’ (Angelides, 2001). However, Krafft-Ebing seemed contrary in his opinion of the physical aspect of the psychic hermaphrodite, or bisexual. On the one hand it has been said that he believed that neither the body of the psychic hermaphrodite, nor their psychological features would necessarily hint at any inversion (Oosterhuis, 2000). On the other hand Krafft-Ebing’s case studies do discuss some physical aspects of the psychic hermaphrodite, for example, that they might have ‘normal’ genitals, but more masculine bodies than in a ‘normal’ heterosexual woman (as described in Chapter Two).

**Bisexuality as a primitive ancestral state**

Krafft-Ebing became increasingly interested in the idea that bisexuality was a part of the evolutionary process. His belief was that non-heterosexuality in any form was indicative of a primitive state, and a regression to a lower life form (Terry, 1999:46). He concluded that it was possible that human’s evolutionary ancestors were hermaphrodite, or ‘bisexual’ (Oosterhuis, 2000; Bullough, 1994). Consequently he theorised bisexuality as the root from which all other sexual identities, including homosexuality, evolved (Oosterhuis, 2000; Hemmings, 2002). This concept positions bisexuality as a predevelopmental or immature state, and the latter notion remains prevalent today. Drawing on various biological and genetic theories, Krafft-Ebing agreed with Ulrichs that during the early stages of development all human embryos
are 'bisexual', becoming one sex or the other as they matured. It is apparent that early conceptualisations of bisexuality understood it to be the starting point from which all humans evolved (Oosterhuis, 2000, Bullough, 1994).

**From biological and gender inversion theories towards ‘degenerate desires’**

Krafft-Ebing was an important influence in sexology, and played a key part in the medicalisation of homosexuality. This era saw a shift away from homosexual behaviours being theorised as morally deviant, and instead homosexuality became associated with sickness and mental illness (Weeks, 1989). Unlike Ulrich, Krafft-Ebing considered homosexuality as degenerate (Kennedy, 1981. Terry, 1999), and claimed that the cause was an underlying nervous disorder that included physical symptoms such as ‘dimensions, postures, gestures, and mannerisms that set them [homosexuals] apart from normal people’ (Terry, 1999:46). At the turn of the century reproductive heterosexual sex was considered the only form of appropriate sexual behaviour, and non-procreative sex became pathologised73 (Queen, 1996). Krafft-Ebing has been held responsible as ‘the true founder of modern pathology’ (Bloch 1908:455 in Bristow, 1997:26) because his work created a distinct division ‘between pathological homosexual desire and healthy heterosexual love’ (Bristow, 1997:32)74.

Krafft-Ebing’s research comprised case studies of individuals who had been tried in court (Brennan & Hegarty, 2007). In these, rather than being described as part of the evolutionary process, psychic hermaphroditism was defined in terms of attraction; primarily same-sex desire, with some other sex desire (Oosterhuis, 2000). Krafft-Ebing’s case studies then, conceptualised (bi)sexuality as a form of sexual attraction (to men and women), as can be seen in the following extracts, listed under the heading of psychic hermaphroditism:

73 Much of the sexological theorising at the turn of the century took place in Europe, but U.S. doctors were also beginning to consider (homo)sexuality. In common with European research, they considered homosexuality deviant, and associated it with gender inversion. They theorised bisexuality as the ancestral gender of all humans. Many doctors, in particular James G. Kiernan (1852-1923), considered bisexuality to be an evolutionary throwback, to a low primitive state. ‘Deviance’ was either a matter of biogenetics, or congeniality (determined during development in the uterus) (see, for example, Terry, 1999). The overarching view was of the time was sexual diversity as inborn, rather than made (Bullough, 1994).

74 It is worth noting here that the ideas of early sexologists and psychologists can often appear contradictory, due to their changing and developing ideas over the course of their lifetime. In later work Krafft-Ebing did show an inclination towards a less pathologising approach. He began to position alternative sexual behaviour and identities as **variance** rather than simply **deviance** (Bullough, 1994; Brennan & Hegarty, 2007).
Case 153:

'She confessed that she always inclined more to persons of her own sex, and that, although she esteemed and liked her husband, sexual intercourse disgusted her [...] she interested herself in other young ladies in a manner which she could only describe as love. At times, however, she also found herself drawn to certain gentlemen'.

Case 154:

'Mrs M, forty-four years of age, claimed to be an instance illustrating that fact that in one and the same human being, be it man or woman, the inverted as well as the normal direction of sexual life may be combined. [...] The first sentiments and emotions lay in the homosexual direction [...] but her sexual inclinations turned now to woman, now to man' (Krafft-Ebing, 1886/1997:171-174).

Krafft-Ebing differed from Ulrichs in that he considered 'non-normative' sexuality a psychological, or acquired condition as well as a biological, or inborn one (Bristow, 1997). In later years Krafft-Ebing elaborated further on which aspects of homosexuality he believed to be biological, and which were acquired or psychological. Bisexuality fell into the category of a constitutional or 'built in' sexuality (Oosterhuis, 2000). As French philosopher Michel Foucault (1926-1984) highlighted, this era of sexology represents a shift away from theorising sexual behaviour, and a turn towards the notion of sexual identity:

'Homosexuality appeared as one of the forms of sexuality when it was transposed from the practice of sodomy onto a kind of interior androgyny [...] The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species' (Foucault, 1978:43).

German physician and pioneering sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld (1868-1935) was homosexual himself, and therefore had a tolerant approach to homosexuality⁷⁵ (Bullough, 1994; 2003; Bennan & Hegarty, 2007). He too considered sexuality as...

⁷⁵German sex-researcher Iwan Bloch (1872-1922) had radically challenged the deviance models of this era, and had moved away from medical and pathological viewpoints, towards a tolerant outlook of sexuality. He influenced subsequent sexologists including Hirschfeld and Freud (Bullough, 1994).
inherently interlinked with gender, and suggested that early in development all humans have characteristics of both sexes. However, he believed that characteristics of the ‘other’ sex would recede during ‘normal’ development, and as a result any potential for same-sex attraction would also ebb. Therefore ‘most people’ orientated towards being attracted to the ‘opposite sex’ and became heterosexual. He suggested that there were two exceptions to this: homosexuality, where the desire for members of the same sex did not recede, and bisexuality (psychic hermaphroditism), where men and women could love and desire members of both sexes (Brennan & Hegarty, 2007).

The pioneering heterosexual British sex researcher and physician Henry Havelock Ellis was a contemporary of Hirschfeld, and was noted for his tolerance of homosexuality.

He too believed that sexuality was an innate, natural and harmless condition (Storr, 1999a; Bullough, 1994). Ellis upheld ‘gender inversion’ theories (Storr, 1999a), and used them to accommodate bisexuality:

‘Psychosexual hermaphroditism [...] is the somewhat awkward name given to that form of inversion in which there exists a sexual attraction to both sexes. It is decidedly less common than simple inversion. We are only justified in including within this group those persons who find sexual pleasure and satisfaction both with men and with women, but in some cases the homosexual is more powerful than the heterosexual instinct, and it is possible that these should really be regarded as cases of simple inversion. We have to remember that there is every inducement for the sexual invert to cultivate a spurious attraction to the opposite sex. In some cases the heterosexual instinct seems to have been acquired; in others however the homosexual instinct is apparently acquired’ (Ellis, 1897, quoted in Storr, 1999a:17, emphasis added).

Ellis’ discussion appears to encourage the idea that those who are bisexual may ‘actually’ be heterosexual or gay, a notion which remains today. However, later in his work he also considered bisexual individuals as a distinct category of people who are attracted to men and women:

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76 However, Ellis has received criticism from some feminist historians. Anti-feminists of the era accused feminists of being pseudo-males. Therefore, Ellis’ description of the lesbian as masculine led to feminists being accused of lesbianism, which undermined women’s emancipation (see, for example, Jeffreys, 1985).
‘there would thus seem to be a broad and simple grouping of all sexually functioning persons into three comprehensive divisions: the heterosexual, the bisexual, and the homosexual’ (Ellis, 1905/1942:261-262, quoted in Fox, 1995:50).

Until Ellis’ work, bisexuality was (primarily) understood as the root of homosexuality, but his later theories saw a conceptual shift towards ‘bisexual’ as a distinct category. Sexology had begun to develop a ‘descriptive system to classify a striking range of sexual types of person (bisexual, heterosexual, homosexual, and their variants)’ (Bristow, 1997:13), which changed the way in sexuality was conceptualised.

**Universal human bisexuality**

Neurologist and psychiatrist Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) was a contemporary of Ellis and Hirschfeld. However, his work has been attributed as the key factor in an important shift in sexual theory, because he moved away from medicinal and biological explanations, towards psychological and familial ones (Fox, 1995). Freud, like Krafft-Ebing, Ellis and Hirschfeld, used the term psychic hermaphroditism as meaning the combination of masculinity and femininity. However, like Ellis, Freud also talked about bisexuality as a sexual identity, and believed that all humans had a bisexual disposition: ‘human beings are by nature bisexual, in Freud’s view, both biologically and psychologically’ (Young-Bruehl, 2001:184).

Like Hirschfeld, Freud initially explained bisexuality as the root of all sexualities, suggesting that homosexuality could be ‘traced back to the constitutional bisexuality of all human beings’ (Freud, 1925/1963, in Fox, 1995:49). He believed that all children pass through a stage of homosexuality as part of their resolution of the Oedipus complex (Terry, 1999; Fox, 1995; Garber, 1995/2000), and he hypothesised that through repression ‘most people choose one sex or the other [...] all the time retaining in their unconscious minds the road not taken’ (Young-Bruehl, 2001:184). Freud concluded that in ‘normal’ human development ‘same-sex desires are repressed or sublimated and heterosexual ones allowed to arise’, whereas homosexuality and bisexuality were ‘the result of a series of psychological malfunctions’ (Fairington, 2008:268).
Bisexuality was a psychological failure to orientate\(^{77}\) in one direction or the other (Yukman, 1996; Fairington, 2008), which conceivably informs the understanding that bisexuality is not a valid identity position. The idea that everyone may have an ‘implicit, universal bisexual potential’ (Udis-Kessler, 1996b:52, also see Rust, 1995; Garber, 1995/2000; Young-Bruehl, 2001; Yoshino, 2000; Miller, 2002), is problematic because it is only a potential (Rust, 1995; Hemmings, 2002). The individual is expected to come to focus their sexual energies on one sex during psychological and social development. Therefore, the end result of the bisexual ‘potential’ is that it ultimately results in the heterosexual or homosexual, and so the bisexual remains invisible (Rust, 1995).

However, conversely Freud ‘was among the first theorists [alongside Ellis] to declare bisexuality as a unique and viable sexual orientation/identity category’ (Dodge, Reece & Gebhard, 2008:179). Freud stated that:

> 'It is well known that at all times there have been, as there still are, human beings who can take as their sexual objects persons of either sex without the one trend interfering with the other. We call these people “bisexual” and accept the fact of their existence without wondering too much at it .... but we have come to know that all human beings are bisexual in this sense and that their libido is distributed between objects of both sexes’ (Freud, 1937/1964, quoted in Young-Bruehl, 2001:183).

Recent authors have concluded that despite regarding bisexuality as central to human sexuality, for Freud it was also ‘the mysterious heart of human sexuality’ (Storr, 1999a:21), which he was never able to explain satisfactorily. As Freud’s therapeutic model developed, his ideas became the dominant ones of the time. This may have been because the therapeutic application of his work allowed sexologists to make a living from his theories. Whereas Hirschfeld and Ellis were empirical researchers, Freud offered the most accessible application of sexology, in the form of psychiatric ‘treatment’ to ‘help’ individuals (Bullough, 1994).

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\(^{77}\) It has been argued that the term ‘orientation’ is in itself problematic in establishing the ‘validity’ of bisexuality. To refer to an ‘orientation’ implies that sexuality is unidirectional, which reinforces ‘assumptions of a clear heterosexual/homosexual binary that works to suppress the existence of bisexuality and queer identities’ (Waites, 2005:545).
Freud’s work represents the beginning of psychoanalytical theorising of sexuality and other psychoanalysts took up his idea of bisexuality as a stage in psychosexual development. Austrian psychoanalyst Wilhelm Stekel (1868-1940) was a follower of Freud (Storr, 1999a), and his ideas mirrored Freud’s. Accordingly he too discussed bisexuality in terms of dual attraction as opposed to a dual gender, and asserted that everyone was ‘innately bisexual’. He took this a step further than Freud had, and saw attraction to only one gender as neurotic and unnatural (Storr, 1999a). He argued that if humans are by origin bisexual, then homosexuality and heterosexuality are the ‘troubled psychosexual states’ (Fairuyton, 2008:268), because they rely on the repression of a ‘natural’ starting point of dual attraction. However this idea does not seem to have been incorporated by others (Storr, 1999a; Fairuyton, 2008).

Others psychoanalysts placed emphasis on familial influence as the cause of sexuality and femininity or masculinity (see Fox, 1995). The psychoanalytic era also saw bisexuals as cowardly homosexuals ‘trying to adjust to societal norms’ (Bullough, 1994:178). From this, a link can be made between psychoanalytical theory and the contemporary notion of the cowardly bisexual who is really homosexual, but does not wish to be stigmatised as such (e.g., Hemings, 2002).

To summarise, early sexologists initially theorised the ‘psychic hermaphrodite’ (a term which preceded the term bisexual) as a person who possessed both masculine and feminine traits. However, by the turn of the century some sexologists and psychologists conceptualised the ‘bisexual’ as a person who was attracted to men and women. The work of the early sexologists is critically important, because they provided the underpinnings of our current day terminology, and understandings of, sexuality and sexual identity (e.g., Weeks, 1989; Oosterhuis, 2000). Their theories also enabled the emergence of dichotomous understandings of sexuality which place bisexuality as ‘in the middle’ of homosexuality and heterosexuality.

Second wave sexology

The next generation of sex research saw a significant change in how bisexuality was conceptualised. While the 1940s saw a surge of interest in sex research in the U.S., little was occurring in Europe. To study sex was still taboo within society, but there was an increasing awareness of the importance of understanding human sexuality and sexual behaviour (Bullough, 1994). There was less focus on either gender inversion
theories, or ideas of universal bisexuality, and the research of U.S. zoologist Alfred Kinsey in the 1940s/1950s was less pathologising of sexual behaviour and sexuality than sexologists had been. This era also saw a move away from binary models, towards a continuum theory of sexuality.

Sexuality as a continuum

Alfred Kinsey (1894–1956) was a zoologist at Indiana University. As a taxonomist, he was interested in collating ‘facts’ about sexual behaviour, and believed that there was a shortage of information on what people did sexually, and who with. Between 1938 and Kinsey’s death in 1956, he and his colleagues conducted 20,000 interviews asking participants about their sexual behaviours (Ericksen & Steffen, 1999).

A key finding of his research was that 37% of men had engaged in at least one post adolescent sexual encounter of physical contact with another man to the point of orgasm during their adult life (Kinsey, Pomeroy & Martin, 1948:623). Furthermore, another 13% of men had ‘responded erotically to another man although they had never actually had sex with another man’ (Rust, 1995:29), and 28% of women had ‘experienced erotic response to other women’ (Rust, 1995:29). These statistics shocked both scientists and the public, because homosexuality had been considered far rarer than these findings indicated (Rust 1995, Bullough 1994).

Kinsey also provided a significant challenge to first wave sexology, when he rejected the dominant inversion theories of the early sex researchers. In doing so he refuted the stereotype of the effeminate homosexual:

'[I]n studies of human behaviour, the term inversion is applied to sexual situations in which males play female roles and females play male roles.

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78 A popular story, propagated by Kinsey himself in order to maintain his credentials as a ‘valid scientist’ (Ericksen & Steffen, 1999:57), tells of how his interest in sex came through his involvement on a university course about marriage (e.g., Bullough 1994, Storr 1999a). However, he had an interest in sex research long before the course began (Ericksen & Steffen, 1999).

79 Although Kinsey was confident that these figures were robust (Kinsey et al., 1948), his sampling has been criticised. Rather than use a random sampling technique, he chose to represent different sectors of the U.S. population, and selected participants himself, in an attempt to ‘represent all sexual tastes’. He relied heavily on prison populations to ensure that ‘lower level’ classes of people were included, and consequently may have overestimated ‘less common sexual activities such as same-gender sexual behaviour’ (Ericksen & Steffen, 1999:8).
in sex relations. [...] there has been a widespread opinion [...] that inversion is an invariable accompaniment of homosexuality. However, this generalization is not warranted [...] there are great many males who remain as masculine, and a great many females who remain as feminine, in their attitudes and their approaches in homosexual relations [...] Inversion and homosexuality are two distinct and not always correlated types of behaviour’ (Kinsey et al., 1948:615).

Kinsey’s theories provided less prescriptive ideas of what homosexuality entailed, and were the ‘first major challenge’ to dichotomous models of sexuality’ (Rust, 1995:29), partly because he advocated wide variations in sexuality, which challenged the notion that people fall into one of two distinct categories of sexuality:

‘Males do not represent two discrete populations, heterosexual and homosexual. The world is not to be divided into sheep and goats. Not all things are black nor all things white. It is a fundamental of taxonomy that nature rarely deals with discrete categories. Only the human mind invents categories and tries to force facts into separated pigeon-holes. The living world is a continuum in each and every one of its aspects. The sooner we learn this concerning human sexual behaviour the sooner we shall reach a sound understanding of the realities of sex’ (Kinsey et al., 1948:639).

The figures that he had gathered indicated that very few members of his sample were exclusively homosexual. Subsequently he deemed identity labels as unhelpful, arguing that sexuality and sexual experience is more fluid and diverse than dichotomous labels such as ‘homosexuality’ and ‘heterosexuality’ suggest (Dodge et al., 2008). His rejection of stringent categories of sexuality led him to develop his own famous seven point scale (see, Figure 3.1) to measure sexual behaviour (Bullough, 1994:178). Kinsey termed both ‘attraction’ and ‘behaviour’ as relevant aspects of sexual preference and accounted for both within his classification scale.
Figure 3.1: The Kinsey Seven Point Scale:

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<th>2</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Exclusively heterosexual</td>
<td>Predominantly heterosexual,</td>
<td>Predominantly homosexual,</td>
<td>Midpoint:</td>
<td>Predominantly homosexual,</td>
<td>Predominantly homosexual,</td>
<td>Exclusively homosexual</td>
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<td></td>
<td>with no homosexual</td>
<td>with no homosexual</td>
<td>only</td>
<td>Equally</td>
<td>but more than</td>
<td>but more than</td>
<td>homosexual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>only</td>
<td>only</td>
<td>but more than</td>
<td>heterosexual</td>
<td>and</td>
<td>incidentally</td>
<td>heterosexual</td>
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<td></td>
<td>incidentally</td>
<td>incidentally</td>
<td>incidentally</td>
<td>heterosexual</td>
<td>incidentally</td>
<td>incidentally</td>
<td>heterosexual</td>
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(Kinsey et al., 1948:638)
The renowned scale ranges from exclusively heterosexual (Kinsey 0), through to exclusively homosexual (Kinsey 6). A Kinsey 3 would be someone on the midpoint, equally homosexual and heterosexual. Writing in the volume on male sexuality, he classed the remaining numbers as graduations of sexuality, taking into account both ‘overt sexual experience and/or his psychosexual reactions’ (Kinsey et al., 1948:647). He also saw an individual’s position on the scale as open to change over time (Ericksen & Steffen, 1999), indicating his belief in the fluidity of sexual preference. Kinsey’s model cannot be underestimated in its contribution to understandings of sexuality, and his work instigated much discussion and future research (e.g., Bullough, 2004). However, as is evidenced in contemporary understandings of bisexuality, his continuum model did not dislodge binary understandings of sexuality, because ‘the wall between gay and straight didn’t exactly come tumbling down in the wake of Kinsey’s research’ (Fairryington, 2008:269).

Kinsey has been attributed with validating the range of potential for human sexuality, and he acknowledged ‘those of us who are neither sheep nor goats’ (Burleson, 2008:262). He believed that all humans had the potential to be bisexual, which signified a shift away from the psychoanalytic era which had seen bisexuals as ‘cowardly homosexuals’ (Bullough, 1994).

Kinsey spoke only briefly about bisexuality per se. In Sexual Behavior in the Human Female Kinsey (Kinsey, Pomeroy, Martin & Gebhard, 1953) wrote that among both men and women, there were a considerable number of people who had ‘homosexual’ and ‘heterosexual’ attractions or behaviours, sometimes sequentially and sometimes simultaneously. He problematised academic binary understandings of bisexuality when he said:

‘Many of those who are academically aware of it still fail to comprehend the realities of the situation. It is characteristic of the human mind that it tries to dichotomize in its classification of phenomena. Things are either so, or they are

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80 This was despite suggestions that Kinsey himself was bisexual, and therefore likely to have had a personal interest in the topic of bisexuality. Certainly later in his life, he engaged in sex with both men and women (e.g., Stevenson, Black, Blank, Bullough, Marer-Banasik, Saris & Young, 1999), and his bisexual behaviour was portrayed in the 2005 film, Kinsey which told the story of his life (Boynton, 2005).

81 Ironically, in Human Behavior in the Human Male (Kinsey et al., 1948) Kinsey ‘revealed major insights into bisexual behavior and orientation without ever using the word bisexual’ (Dodge et al., 2008:180).
not so. Sexual behavior is either normal or abnormal, socially acceptable or unacceptable, heterosexual or homosexual; and many persons do not want to believe that there are graduations in these matters’ (Kinsey et al., 1953:469).

Despite his affirmative outlook, and his drawing attention to how bisexuality had been overlooked and dismissed, the concept of bisexuality was still relatively invisible within Kinsey’s work (Dodge et al., 2008). He and his colleagues avoided theorising either the origins or meanings of sexuality, although it has been reported that he saw sexuality as the outcome of a combination of biological and cultural influences. However, he considered that entering into debate on the topic would leave his work open to abuse from religious or medical sources, who might use his conclusions to pathologise non-heterosexuality (Ericksen & Steffen, 1999; Dodge et al., 2008).

He was critical of prudishness in first wave sexology, claiming that researchers had been heavily influenced by the dominant moralistic values of the time, and that their work was unscientific. Despite this, he held his own morals regarding heterosexual marriage and family as an ideal, because it meant that individuals would have their sexual needs met, and children would be cared for. Therefore he believed that marriage would uphold social stability and overcome the risk of ‘sexual disarray’ (Ericksen & Steffen, 1999:49). In contrast, Kinsey saw homosexual sex as secondary, a lapse from heterosexual marital sex, which if treated with tolerance need not threaten the family unit (Ericksen & Steffen, 1999). He considered promiscuity and instability inherent within homosexual relations, even though his own data did not support this notion (Bullough, 1994).

Nonetheless he was a sexual libertarian who resisted using medical or religious ideals of what constituted ‘normal’ behaviour. He considered that whatever ‘existed in nature must be normal’ (Ericksen & Steffen, 1999:49). His statistics of homosexual behaviour provided significant challenge to the pathologisation of non-heterosexual behaviours (Angelides, 2001:111), which led to U.S. society (somewhat) moving away from viewing homosexuality as illness. Kinsey’s research was an instigating factor in the founding of the gay liberation movement because he encouraged homosexual people to ‘come out of the closet’ (Bullough, 1994), which meant that gay men and lesbians realised they were not alone and began to look for each other (Bullough, 1994; Rust, 1995).
Ignoring and minimalising bisexuality: Sex research and sex surveys of the 1970s and 1980s

Despite the potential that Kinsey’s work provided for further theorising of sexuality, subsequent sexologists did not immediately choose to engage with theory. The initial interests of U.S. gynaecologist William Masters (1915-2001), and his assistant Virginia Johnson (born 1925) were not in the development of specific theories of sexuality. Instead, their focus was primarily on the way the human body responded physiologically during sexual arousal. They believed that this knowledge would allow people to overcome their sexual ‘problems’ (Bullough, 1994), and developed a model of sex called the Human Sexual Response Cycle (Masters & Johnson, 1966/1981) which they believed was universal (Tiefer, 2002). Masters and Johnson’s key contribution was in greater understanding of human physiology⁵, although they have also been credited with acknowledging sexual pleasure, and making sex research and sex therapy acceptable. It has been argued that they led the way for future sexologists’ work, in education, therapy and research (Bullough, 1994:209).

However, their understanding of human sexology privileged biological and physiological models of (hetero)sexuality (Tiefer, 2002), and they often pathologised homosexuality, and positioned heterosexuality as the desired and ‘natural’ state (Boyle, 1993). They also rarely mentioned bisexuality. Their later work, Homosexuality in Perspective (Masters & Johnson, 1979) did include an index entry for bisexuality, but the reader is directed to the index entry for ‘ambisexual study group’ (p438). This group consisted of twelve participants who had no particular preference in the sex of their partner. By coining their own term (ambisexuality), Masters and Johnson rendered bisexuality invisible even when it was (very minimally) included (Garber, 1995/2000). In Masters and Johnson on Sex and Human Loving (Masters, Johnson & Kolodny, 1985), bisexuality is referred to on only three of the six-hundred pages. They

⁵Feminist scholars have been heavily critical of Masters and Johnson’s work, for its often overlooking homosexuality (Boyle, 1993), and its wider sexist and heterosexist assumptions (Boyle, 1993; Tiefer, 2002; 2004). They also used a biased sample of participants high in socio-economic status and intelligence, who were mainly married, and sexually active (Tiefer, 2002). Further, Masters and Johnson Human Sexual Response Cycle (Masters & Johnson, 1966/1981) focused on men’s active pleasure in sex, over women’s passive (lack of) desire (Boyle, 1993). Masters and Johnson’s universal physiological sexual response patterns of arousal and orgasm (‘normal’ sexual function) have been used to create (so-called) ‘dysfunctions’ (e.g., Boyle, 1993; Tiefer, 2002; 2004), which pharmaceutical companies profit from, and women do not (see, for example, Tiefer, 2002; 2004, for in depth discussions of Female Sexual Dysfunction).
Part One

Chapter Three: Everyone and everywhere, or no one and nowhere: Two hundred years of conceptualising bisexuality

state that the ‘cause’ of bisexuality is unknown, and position it as a puzzle, because it does not fit neatly into other theories about sexual orientation and its origins. U.S. bisexual theorist Marjorie Garber has argued that their language is problematic because a “cause” and an “origin” implies an etiology, like that of an illness’ (Garber, 1995/2000:264). She also highlights the monosexuality present in their publications (see, Garber, 1995/2000). This trend towards ignoring or minimalising bisexuality continued for a number of years, evidenced in the sex surveys that took place during the 1970s/80s.

Kinsey’s use of survey methodology prompted other sexuality researchers to choose similar methods, perhaps the most prominent of which was The Hite Report (1976/2000), by journalist Shere Hite (born 1942). As a feminist, Hite felt that women’s rights extended to their bodies and after leaving university began researching women’s sexualities. She distributed thousands of questionnaires83, which were filled out anonymously. In these, she asked women how they felt during sexual activities and orgasm, and her findings built on the work of both Kinsey, and Masters and Johnson. She was also interested in how women gave meaning to their experience, because she believed that researchers had often told women how they should feel rather than asked them how they felt (Hite, 1976/2000). The Hite Report on women’s sexuality was published in 1976, and has since sold more than 48 million copies around the world. The publication of the report was hugely influential. Hite’s work made an important contribution both to sexology, and to wider cultural understandings of sexuality, and she became a household name, credited with having fuelled the sexual revolution of the 1970s (Deutsch, 2006).

Nine percent of her female respondents reported that they either identified as bisexual, or had sexual experiences with both men and women (Hite, 1976/2000:376). She discussed various estimates of frequency of lesbianism and bisexuality among women, and in doing so referred to the work of psychiatrist Dr Richard Green. He had suggested that identification with lesbianism and bisexuality had increased due to

83Hite asked volunteers to write to her and take part (through appearances on television and ‘women’s’ magazines), and distributed questionnaires to a range of ‘organisations’ (including church, political, and counselling groups, old people’s homes and universities). Her sampling technique has been critiqued as haphazard, biased and non-representative of the general population (e.g., Smith, 1989, Greenberg, Brueiss & Conklin, 2011).
second wave feminism and its discourse of disassociation from dependency upon men (Hite, 1976/2000).

However, Hite did not engage in much depth regarding bisexuality. The section entitled ‘What types of bisexual answers were received?’ (Hite, 1976/2000:397) is part of a chapter on lesbianism, hence the mention is rather tokenistic, and appears to consider bisexuality a sub-category of lesbian. Hite cites only two bisexual participants, the first a woman who talks of her guilt around her sexual behaviour, though not specifically with regard to her sexuality per se. She discusses her enjoyment of sex with both men and women, and discloses that she is in a monogamous relationship with a man. The second participant reports how she fell in love with her woman friend, and two men (Hite, 1976/2000). These excerpts are rather perfunctory, and do not contain enough information to provide a meaningful account of bisexual women’s experiences.

In her writing, Hite put forward her beliefs about ‘behaviour’ versus ‘identity’. She stated that:

“lesbian,” “homosexual,” and “heterosexual” should be used as adjectives, not nouns: people are not properly described as homosexuals, lesbians or heterosexuals; rather activities are properly described as homosexual, lesbian, or heterosexual’ (Hite, 1976/2000:377, emphasis in original).

Hite’s participants had expressed an interest in having sex with women, which led her to conclude that sexuality was fluid. However, understandings of sexuality which are based on ‘behaviour’ rather than ‘identity’ can reinforce the invisibility of bisexuality. Hite infers that a woman is ‘doing lesbian’ when she engages in same sex behaviour, and ‘doing heterosexual’ when she is engaging in ‘opposite’ sex behaviour. There is little space for bisexuality to exist, because for a woman to be ‘bisexual’, she has to engage in threesomes or group sex with both men and women. This notion feeds into the idea that bisexual people are promiscuous and kinky. Other bisexual affirmative authors have noted that conceptualising identity in terms of sexual behaviour alone can lead to a misunderstanding of bisexuality:

‘Much of the confusion and conflict that sexologists experience when focusing on bisexuality arises from the faulty placement of emphasis on genital sexual
activity, rather than on the larger issues of loving. Simply put, genitality is *not* all of sexuality. It is probable that sexuality, including bisexuality, relates to affection and affiliation as well as to genital behaviour. This simple distinction is essential to an understanding of the phenomenon of bisexuality. Without it researchers will continue to be at a loss when trying to explain the confused concepts which supposedly define the problems of bisexuals’ (Hansen & Evans, 1985:2, emphasis in original).

Hite stated that sexual terms *should* only be used as adjectives. However, bisexual people, lesbians and gay men often feel a strong sense of their identity in a way that is not purely about behaviour because ‘[o]ne’s sexual identity label reflects both the organization of one’s self concept and one’s membership in or allegiance to a particular group or social movement’ (Zinik, 1985:8). Both by bringing behaviour to the forefront, and only mentioning bisexuality in passing within her chapter on lesbianism, Hite’s report minimised bisexuality as a ‘valid’ identity.

A more recent sex survey, the Janus Report, conducted by U.S. sexologists Samuel Janus and Cynthia Janus (1993), was mainly concerned with the frequency of sexual activities, ‘attitudes’ and behaviours. Their report contains only two pages that mention bisexuality (Garber, 1995/2000, has suggested that had they considered attractions and fantasies rather than only behaviour, they would have had a larger bisexual sample), which was once again located as a subcategory of ‘homosexuality’. They end the section by using a quotation from a bisexual man who questions why he should eliminate half the population, and use this as support for the idea that ‘[m]any Americans seem to act out the popular injunction “Do your own thing” without taking labels seriously’ (Janus & Janus, 1993:71). In this final reference to bisexuality it could be argued that choosing to use such a quote upholds the notion that those who are bisexual are promiscuous and greedy, wanting it all. The Janus report makes no further reference to bisexuality.
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Chapter Three: Everyone and everywhere, or no one and nowhere:
Two hundred years of conceptualising bisexuality

From early ‘gay affirmative’ psychological research, to early ‘bisexual affirmative’ research

Pioneering gay affirmative researchers - and their omission of bisexuality

During the 1950s, pioneering U.S. clinical psychologist Evelyn Hooker (1907-1996) had conducted a groundbreaking study of homosexual men, which was perhaps the first ever gay affirmative research. When she conducted her study, homosexuality was listed as a mental disorder in the American Psychiatric Association’s Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM). Consequently, homosexuality was understood as psychologically and morally deviant, and was a criminal offence (Hooker, 1957; Floyd & Szymanski, 2007).

Kinsey’s argument against pathologising homosexuality had been based on the prevalence of non-heterosexual behaviours within his sample (Kinsey et al., 1948; 1953). Following Kinsey, Hooker also challenged the pathologisation of homosexuality, using empirical evidence from her research to underpin her argument for tolerance (Angelides, 2001). Hooker obtained funding from the U.S. National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH). She recruited self identifying homosexual men from The Mattachine Society (discussed in Chapter Two), and formed a matched pair sample with self identifying heterosexual men (as a control group)\(^{84}\). Her design was to instruct both samples to complete a number of projective tests, and then ask expert clinicians to distinguish between the results of homosexual and heterosexual men, which they were unable to do (Hooker, 1957). This groundbreaking result challenged the notion that homosexuality was a mental illness (Bullough, 1994; Terry 1999; Kimmel & Garnets, 2003).

On the basis of her work, both professional and lay people began to consider the idea that an individual could actually be a ‘healthy homosexual’ (e.g., Terry, 1999), hence she contributed to a direct reversal of the notion of homosexuality as pathological. Subsequently, it was opposition to homosexuality which was problematised because a

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\(^{84}\)Hooker (1957) described the task of securing her sample as ‘fraught with extreme difficulties’ (p.18). With ‘considerable effort’ (p.19), she recruited 30 homosexual, and 30 heterosexual men, matched on age (ranging from 25-50), education level, and IQ.
transition occurred in which negative societal attitudes about homosexuality were defined as the problem (D’Augelli & Garnets, 1995:296).

Hooker has been described as ‘the foremother of the gay liberation movement’ (Kimmel & Garnets, 2003:31), because the results of her research (alongside Kinsey’s) were used by the early homophile movement to argue that homosexuality was not an illness. This argument was eventually used to persuade the APA to remove homosexuality from the DSM. This had a huge impact on the lives of lesbians and gay men (Kimmel & Garnets, 2003; Floyd & Szymanski, 2007), and Hooker’s research has been credited with changing ‘the psychological understanding of human sexuality’ (Kimmell & Garnets, 2003:31).

However, others have called into question the implications of her work (e.g., Minton, 2002; Warner, 2004). Hooker worked with a very particular sample of white, middle class men who participated in an organised gay community and valued monogamy. Warner (2004) has argued that through Hooker’s research, it was white, middle class, monogamous men that became appropriated as a ‘normal male homosexual’ (Warner, 2002:327). Furthermore, during her recruitment Hooker was extremely distrustful of participant’s self identification. She wanted to ensure that her sample contained only ‘pure’ homosexuals and heterosexuals. She eliminated heterosexual participants who had more than one homosexual experience (because she suspected they were ‘latent homosexuals’) and homosexual men who had more than three heterosexual experiences (Hooker, 1957). Therefore, her strategy excluded anyone who was behaviourally bisexual; her model of sexuality incorporated only ‘pure’ homo and ‘pure’ heterosexuality. In effect this meant that through her dismissal of bisexual behaviour, bisexual identity was rendered invisible.

British clinical psychologist June Hopkins’ (1969) research was perhaps the first gay affirmative research on women. Her study of ‘the lesbian personality’ was similar to Hooker’s study, in that she used personality and intelligence tests, created a matched

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85Similarly, Kitzinger (1987) has argued that more widely ‘liberal humanistic psychology replaces the sick homosexual with the sick homophobe’ (p.57).
86It has been noted that ‘bisexuality, per se, was never officially classified or declassified as a mental disorder’ (Dodge et al., 2008:183). It was either assumed to be a subcategory of homosexuality, or simply overlooked (Dodge et al., 2008).
pair sample (of lesbian and heterosexual women\textsuperscript{87}), and recruited from a homophile organisation (the Minorities Research Group). Hopkins aimed to ‘describe the lesbian personality’ (p.1433), accurately and objectively. Hopkins hypothesised that there would be no significant differences between the lesbian and heterosexual women’s results on a number of personality tests, a prediction which contradicted psychiatric and psychoanalytic theories of lesbian neuroticism. In her results, she concluded that neither the lesbian nor the heterosexual group was ‘overly neurotic’ (p.1435), but that there were significant differences which suggested that the ‘lesbian personality’ was bohemian, composed, dominant, independent, resilient, reserved, and self-sufficient (Hopkins, 1969).

Hopkins asked participants to rate themselves on the Kinsey scale:

‘The women rating themselves between 0 and 2 were placed in the heterosexual group, while those rating themselves between 4 and 6 were placed on the homosexual group. Anyone rating herself as 3 (bisexual) was eliminated from this study’ (Hopkins, 1969:1433).

The disregarding of Kinsey 3s, stems from an assumption that only those exactly in the middle of the Kinsey scale are ‘truly’ bisexual: those who marked themselves as ‘4’ or ‘2’ on the scale could have self-defined (or be described as) bisexual, but they were not excluded, therefore Hopkins’s decision to ask participants to self-rate on the Kinsey scale is problematic. A researcher allocating their participants a sexual identity is a flawed method, because it does not trust self-definitions of participants, which may differ from measurements on scales. Deciding participant identity on their behalf disrespects participants, and reduces the number of people who fall into particular categories, and is therefore inaccurate (Kitzinger, 1987; Morris & Rothblum, 1999).

Further, it may be advantageous to understanding bisexuality if researchers include bisexual people as a distinct group (e.g., homosexual, heterosexual, and bisexual), as it is highly unlikely that bisexual women’s experiences are homogenous with lesbian’s experience (see, for example, Chapter Eight).

\textsuperscript{87}Hopkins recruited twenty-four lesbians and twenty-four heterosexual women, matched on age, intelligence, and professional or educational background (Hopkins, 1969).
Part One

Chapter Three: Everyone and everywhere, or no one and nowhere:
Two hundred years of conceptualising bisexuality

Homosexual identity formation models

Gay affirmative research allowed a gradual shift away from conceptions of homosexual people as mentally ill or neurotic, towards more acceptance and understanding. Psychologists began to focus on developmental models and experiences of ‘being a homosexual’ in their quest to understand more about homosexuality. Australian clinical psychologist Vivienne Cass was interested in how homosexual identity was formed, and her stage model is one of the most cited stage models (Eliason & Schope, 2007) to have emerged during the 1970s and 1980s. Underpinned by developmental and social interactionist theories, she proposed a model of the process of ‘becoming’ a homosexual (Cass, 1979).

The model consisted of six stages of identity development namely: identity confusion, identity comparison, identity tolerance, identity acceptance, identity pride, and, finally, identity synthesis (Cass, 1979). These processes are portrayed as a linear journey from ‘completely heterosexual’ through to ‘completely homosexual’. Once the individual realises that they are homosexual, any heterosexual attraction and behaviour is disregarded (Eliason, 1996). In these early models of homosexual identity development, bisexuality was not explicitly named or included (Eliason, 1996; Rivers, 1997), and therefore these models are entirely exclusionary of bisexual people.

Within these models ‘coming out’ is presented as an inevitable and ultimately positive end result of lesbian and gay, and by implication, (as ‘B’ has become incorporated with ‘L’ and ‘G’), bisexual identity formation (Eliason, 1996; Rivers, 1997; McLean, 2007; Rivers & Gordon, 2010), where to ‘come out’ is understood to be difficult but rewarding (McLean, 2007). ‘Coming out’ is also portrayed as:

‘a singular episode in an LGB person’s life rather than a continuous process of disclosure to new people in new situations [...] It is perhaps a result of the way in

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88See, for example, Rivers (1997), Eliason and Schope (2007), and McLean (2007), for details of key developmental models developed during this era.
89Stage theories and models such as Cass’s have been critiqued for their reliance on retrospective accounts of identity formation (from mainly ‘out’ gay men), their assumption that a ‘homosexual lifestyle’ (which may include promiscuity and immersion in gay communities) is an inevitable part of the developmental process, and for their linearity, which does not capture the personal, social or cultural conflicts of homosexuality (see, for example, Rivers, 1997; Eliason & Schope, 2007; Rivers & Gordon, 2010). Cass has continued to develop her model in response to the critiques of it, particularly in acknowledging the cultural specificity, and in incorporating social aspects such as the role of family and friends (Eliason & Schope, 2007).
which we characterise ‘coming out’ as a singular pivotal moment in development that we have yet to fully understand the complexity of the underlying reasoning and decision making that the process entails’ (Rivers and Gordon, 2010:22).

U.S. lecturer in education, Mary Lou Rasmussen (2004) has described the ‘coming out imperative’ (p.144) that exists for lesbians and gay men, and Australian sociologist Kirsten McLean (2007), has also drawn attention to the ‘disclosure imperative’ that these models have created. To ‘come out’ is a part of healthy development, while to not disclose is ‘bad’ and believed to have a detrimental effect on the integrity of one’s identity (McLean, 2007:151, see also Eliason & Schope, 2007).

McLean (2007) has problematised the disclosure imperative, particularly for bisexual people whose lived experience has proved to be different from that of lesbians and gay men. In her research with bisexual men and women, she concluded that bisexuals may have mixed and complex experiences of coming out, partly due to misrepresentations of bisexuality (such as those described in the first section of this chapter). Consequently, bisexual people may choose to be selective about their ‘outness’, and disclosure may not form an essential part of their bisexual identity.

Since the publication of identity formation models of the 1970s and 1980s, some (mainly mainstream U.S.) psychologists have continued to theorise identity development. More recent models (e.g., D’Augelli, 1994) have specifically named bisexuality within them, and concluded that the ages at which particular stages of identity development may occur vary across lesbian, gay, or bisexual individuals. However, they have still struggled to incorporate bisexuality:

‘Although the [D’Augelli’s] model makes explicit the hurdles lesbians, gay men and, by implication, bisexuals have to ‘jump’ when they decide to ‘come-out’, it is more focused towards the development of lesbians and gay men rather than of bisexuals. Indeed, because bisexuality is, by its very nature, a fluid experience which does not confine itself to a particular gender or sexual orientation, D’Augelli’s model can only work effectively as an index of homosexual (i.e. lesbian and gay) identity formation. [...] It can be applied to the bisexual only when she/he embarks upon a homosexual relationship, but it cannot apply when she/he embarks upon a heterosexual relationship as there will be few, if any,
familial or societal barriers to an individual taking a partner who is a member of the opposite sex' (Rivers, 1997:332-333).

Further to this, research has identified that bisexual people may more broadly experience their 'identity processes' in different ways, and at different periods of their lives from lesbians and gay men (see, for example, Bilodeau & Renn, 2005:27). Incorporating bisexuality within models of lesbian and gay identity development has proved problematic (even when bisexuality is named within them), since their conception in the 1970s and 1980s, through to more recent attempts (see, for example, those models critiqued in Rivers, 1997). The end result is that bisexuality does not exist as a distinct or valid sexual identity within these models.

**Bisexuality as different: sowing the seeds of bisexuality as a separate identity**

Alan Bell, Martin Weinberg and Sue Hammersmith (1981), U.S. sex researchers based in the Kinsey Institute at Indiana University, were also interested in sexual identity development. Their research was progressive, both because they were interested in heterosexual as well as homosexual development, and because it was the first sizable affirmative study of lesbians and gay men. Funded by the U.S. National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), Bell et al. (1981) analysed an expansive data set, based on interviews with 979 homosexual and 477 heterosexual men and women, living in the San Francisco Bay area during 1969-1970. Their interview schedule contained wide ranging questions and their report focuses on family and other relationships, gender conformity, and child and adolescent sexuality.

The majority of the report focused on what led individuals to become ‘homosexual’ or ‘heterosexual’. Bisexuality is contained within a chapter that focuses on ‘different patterns of development’ which includes ‘special types of homosexuals, grouped on the basis of gender nonconformity, bisexuality, psychological therapy, and adult lifestyle’ (Bell et al., 1981:195), hence bisexuality is positioned as a ‘different’ form of homosexuality. Bisexual individuals were classed as such if they rated between a Kinsey 2 and Kinsey 4, which was different from previous studies (e.g., Hopkins, 1969), in which individuals were classed as bisexual only if they were a Kinsey 3. Bell et al. (1981) also used two Kinsey scales; one for sexual feelings and one for sexual behaviours, averaging the result of the two to gain an overall rating.
Eight percent of their male homosexual sample was classed as bisexual, along with 13% of the female homosexual sample. While Bell et al. (1981) clearly saw bisexuality as a subcategory of homosexuality, their work nonetheless seems indicative of a conceptual shift. They analysed the data from bisexual participants separately, and as a result drew different conclusions about bisexuality, than they did about homosexuality. For example, they argued that in men ‘exclusive homosexuality tends to emerge from a deep-seated predisposition, while bisexuality is more subject to influence by social and sexual learning’ (Bell et al., 1981:201). Therefore their understanding of homosexuality was an essentialist one, while they conceptualised bisexuality as a social psychological developmental outcome. Similarly they stated that while exclusively homosexual women appear to have a ‘fixed’ identity by the age of nineteen, bisexual women may only become ‘established’ in their sexuality at a later age. Their recognition of bisexuality as different from either hetero or homosexuality may have contributed to a shift toward more affirmative understandings of bisexuality.

Towards affirmative understandings of bisexuality

The emergence of affirmative psychological research on bisexuality: the 1970s and 1980s

The late 1970s into the mid-1980s witnessed a surge of interest in bisexuality within psychology and social science, particularly in the U.S. (e.g., Klein, 1978/1980; MacDonald, 1982; Paul, 1984; 1985; Hansen & Evans, 1985; Klein & Wolf, 1985; Klein, Sepekoff & Wolf, 1985; Zink, 1985; Coleman, 1987; Shuster, 1987; Morrow, 1989). The time and place of these publications seems to coincide with the emergence of a bisexual identity among men in sexually liberated California in the 1970s (Jeffreys, 1999), and therefore may reflect very particular understandings of bisexuality based on the experiences of (sometimes non-monogamous) U.S. bisexual men. Scholars of this period were instrumental in bringing the topic to the fore within their discussions. Therefore, instead of bisexuality being located within homosexuality research, there began to be some focus specifically on bisexuality as a distinct identity position.

This was important because as Bell et al. (1981) first showed, bisexual experience is not necessarily analogous to that of lesbians and gay men. This era of authors focused on the lack of definitions of bisexuality, and critiqued the existing negative definitions.
They also problematised the measures and (binary) models of sexuality which
excluded bisexuality. This was incredibly important, because through their focus
specifically on bisexuality, an affirmative bisexual narrative was developed both
within, and inspired by, their work.

*Overcoming a lack of definition and exploring the best way to define and measure
(bi)sexuality*

A key contributor during this era was U.S. psychiatrist and sex researcher Fritz (Fred)
Klein (1932-2006). He argued that it was problematic that ‘research into bisexuality
until now could almost be characterized as nonexistent’ (Klein & Wolf, 1985:xv). As a
self-identified bisexual man, Klein emphasised the importance of bisexuality as a topic
worthy of attention in its own right. Klein thought that a definition of bisexuality was
elusive, and that the experience of ‘being bisexual’ was different for every individual.
Furthermore, he saw bisexuality as defined by more than sexual behaviour alone, and
thought that bisexuality lay in the broad spectrum between the exclusive orientations
of the two “monosexualities”’ (Klein & Wolf, 1985:xv).

U.S. counselling clinician and psychologist Gary Zinik (1985) also argued that
bisexuality was misunderstood and under researched. He attributed the lack of
research to the scientific community having equated bisexuality with homosexuality.
Similarly, U.S. clinical psychologists Charles Hansen and Anne Evans (1985) highlighted
the elusiveness of an ‘operational definition’ for the ‘bisexual condition’ (Hansen &
Evans, 1985:1), and argued that sexological research had failed to define bisexuality
adequately, which in turn had led to confusion and conflict around what bisexuality
meant. This type of confusion around the definition of bisexuality is perhaps what lies
at the root of the notion that it is bisexual people who are confused (e.g., McLean,
2008b; Morrison et al., 2010).

Klein’s contribution to bisexual theory and research was in his affirmation of
bisexuality, and his development of the Klein Sexual Orientation Grid (KSOG). Klein
believed that there were thirty to forty million people in the U.S. who were either
attracted to, or had sexual behaviours with, members of both sexes.

He interviewed bisexual people, and described them as uncertain of how to define
their sexuality:
Their confusion lay not in what they thought or felt themselves but rather in the definition they could use for themselves and others. Many thought that they only had the option of two categories to describe their sexual orientation, namely, homosexuality and heterosexuality. Only a small percentage perceived the possibility of the third category of bisexuality' (Klein, 1978/1993:15).

The people he spoke to were clearly constrained by the dominant binary model of sexuality. Initially he brought his participants’ attention to the Kinsey scale. However, he decided that this was too static in its structure and unable to account for either the complexity of sexuality (Klein, 1978/1993) or for life situations and changes over time90 (Klein et al., 1985).

Further, Klein argued that placing bisexuality on a continuum ‘in the middle’ of heterosexuality and homosexuality was overly simplistic. He believed that bisexuality is not as simple as a point intermediate between the bipolar options of homosexuality and heterosexuality, rather it is a combination of the two. If a bisexual person is attracted to a woman, this necessitates that they are situated at that moment in time at one end of the scale. However, they may still be as attracted to men, which would draw them back towards the opposite end of the scale, and therefore obscure their attraction to women. Many bisexual people do not necessarily sit in the middle of the Kinsey scale because they are not equally attracted to men and women at all times91. Additionally, changes in attraction to men and women are not accountable for, because the position on the scale is ‘permanent’, whereas bisexual people may feel that they move along it at different times (Weinrich & Klein, 2002).

This was not the only critique of binary and continuum models of sexuality. Zinik (1985) explained that dichotomous notions struggled to accommodate bisexuality, and argued that this was because models of sexuality were based on the logic that:

'Since men and women are viewed as opposite sexes, it appears contradictory that anyone could eroticize two opposite things at the same time. Attraction to one sex would logically rule out attraction to the other, or else lead to psychological dissonance and conflict' (p.9).

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90 Although Kinsey had suggested that an individual’s position on the scale could vary over their lifetime (e.g., Ericksen & Steffen, 1999).
91 Zinik (1985) highlighted that ‘50:50’ attraction was believed to be quite rare, instead 60:40 or 30:70 ratios were deemed more likely (p.8).
Hansen and Evans (1985) highlighted the ‘law of the excluded middle’. Like Zink (1985), they argued that sexologists, especially Bergler (1956), worked on the understanding that ‘one cannot eroticize two love objects at the same time’ (p.3). Therefore, when a bisexual person engaged in a homosexual encounter, their heterosexual behaviour became counterfeit. Hansen and Evans also suggested that the Kinsey scale ‘trapped’ researchers into theorising bisexuality only in relation to (or as deviations of) homosexuality or heterosexuality. Hansen and Evans (1985) suggested that future research on bisexuality ‘must not be derived from distinctions among heterosexuality, bisexuality and homosexuality’ (Hansen & Evans, 1985:4), but instead view bisexuality as a ‘distinct entity in which heterosexuality and homosexuality may be seen to co-mingle, but not compete’ (p.5).

Hansen and Evans (1985) also attributed inadequate understanding of bisexuality as in part due to a lack of research on the topic, and suggested, like Klein, that those sexologists who had considered bisexuality had conceptualised it too simplistically. Specifically they highlighted a number of issues within sexology, which they believed had caused uncertainty over the meaning of bisexuality. They discussed how cultural understandings considered bisexuality as synonymous with non-monogamy, and suggested that it was the eroticism of bisexuality which had led to it being excluded from research, due to some sexologist’s fear of the erotic. They termed this fear as ‘erophobia’:

‘In post-Victorian western culture, the coincidence of erotic-positive attitudes with erotic-proactive behaviour always provokes anxiety, even among some sexologists. Therefore, bisexuals are often seen as promiscuous. [...] Whereas both heterosexuals and most paired homosexuals embrace some form of fidelity, the concept bisexual (virtually unresearched) suggests attraction to and sexual involvement with anyone, if not everyone. Given such an allegation of open promiscuity, few sexologists would pursue research into the labyrinth of bisexuality’ (Hansen & Evans, 1985:3).

Similar to Klein’s suggestion that (bi)sexuality involved more than just sexual behaviour, Hansen and Evans (1985) argued that sexologists had focused too heavily on studying genital sexual activity, and that as a consequence they had excluded and

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92 The notion of an ‘excluded middle’ is supported by the quote from Klein (above), his bisexual participants seemed not to recognise a ‘middle’ or ‘third’ position of sexuality.
overlooked affection, affiliation, and love and relationships. A focus on genital activity potentially locates sexuality as specifically biological. U.S. anthropologist Gilbert Herdt (1985) argued that the prioritisation of biology may have happened as a result of the social sciences being based on a medicinal model, which led to a focus on (limited) biological and essentialist understandings of identity. In these biological and deterministic understandings, genitalia and biological sex are considered the critical aspect of measuring and defining sexuality, because 'our attractions serve [only] biological purposes' (Coleman, 1987).

Klein also considered the research of U.S. sociologists Philip Blumstein and Pepper Schwartz's (1976). They had interviewed women with 'a history of bisexual behaviour' (p.171) and found a great deal of diversity in the behaviour of women who self-identified as bisexual, and between people's self identification and their behaviour. Some of their participants who had a history of sexual experience with both sexes did not self-identify as bisexual, but instead as heterosexual or homosexual (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1976; Klein et al., 1985). This suggests either an unawareness of the label of 'bisexual', or a hesitance to use it, but both explanations maintain the invisibility of bisexuality as an identity.

With the aim of better understanding the complexity of human sexuality, and in order to provide an alternative to the binary understandings of sexuality which had dominated sexology and psychology since the 1800s, Klein developed the Klein Sexual Orientation Grid93. In his words, the grid 'was designed to extend the scope of the Kinsey scale by including attraction, behaviour, fantasy, social and emotional preference, self-identification and lifestyle [...] in the past, present, and as an ideal' (Klein et al., 1985:38).

The KSOG took into account seven distinct aspects which were sexual attraction, sexual behaviour, sexual fantasies, emotional preference, social preference, heterosexual/homosexual lifestyle and self identification (Klein, 1978/1993). The KSOG

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93The KSOG was not the only alternative measurement tool that emerged during the 1970s and 1980s (see Coleman, 1987, for a useful overview of these). Bell and Weinberg (1978) used two two-dimensional scales in their study of homosexuality, one asking about sexual behaviour, and one about erotic fantasies. Shively and De Cecco (1977) proposed that sexuality be conceptualised in relation to measures of physical, intrapsychic (similar to fantasies), and interpersonal factors. However, such measures and scales remained relatively simplistic, took into consideration less dimensions than Klein's grid and have rarely been used or referred to in the sexuality literature in subsequent decades.
first appeared in Forum Magazine in an article entitled ‘Are you sure you’re heterosexual, or homosexual, or even bisexual?’ (Klein et al., 1985:38), and readers could fill out the grid and rate themselves between ‘one’ for ‘other sex only’ and ‘seven’ for ‘same sex only’. Participants were required to do this for ‘past’, ‘present’ and ‘ideal’ for each of the seven variables (Klein et al., 1985:40-43). They were asked to send their resulting twenty one responses to Klein. Analysis of the results focused on each of the variables, and on changes over time. Klein and his colleagues believed that the grid demonstrated that the labels heterosexual, homosexual and bisexual were inadequate to capture sexuality. However, they were unable to provide clearer definitions of the existing three terms, which they had originally set out to do (Klein et al., 1985). Instead, they concluded that ‘sexual orientation cannot be reduced to a bipolar or even tripolar process, but must be recognized within a dynamic and multi-variate framework’ (Klein et al., 1985:35). He and his colleague (Weinrich & Klein, 2002) later used cluster analysis on 1,471 participant’s results, and suggested that participants could be categorised into three ‘types’ (or degrees) of bisexual people; bi-heterosexual, bi-bisexual and bi-gay/lesbian.

Klein himself recognised that his grid was a complicated way of assessing people’s sexuality, and this may well be why it is little used in sexuality research today. Nonetheless, Klein was one of the first researchers to challenge the ‘monosexual era’, and to fully recognise bisexuality as a valid identity position. Klein’s successors have continued to critique the tools and methods used within lesbian and gay psychology to assess sexuality, and the perpetuation of a dichotomous and trichotomous understanding of sexuality that limit understandings of bisexuality (Coleman, 1987). A more affirmative approach to bisexuality was emerging, amidst an interest in the most appropriate ways of developing definitions and understandings of bisexuality. Much of the literature from this era drew attention to, and challenged, the negative understandings of bisexuality.

**Highlighting and challenging negative conceptualisations of bisexuality**

The roots of negative understandings of bisexuality have been understood to be situated both within sexology and psychology, and within the wider culture. In the section above, I referred to Klein’s finding that bisexual people were seemingly

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94In their paper (Klein et al., 1985), no further details about this publication are given.
confused about their sexuality. Zinik (1985) described what he called the ‘conflict model’ (p.9) of bisexuality. He argued that because bisexual people defied dichotomous understandings of sexuality, they were consequently theorised as:

'(1) Experiencing identity conflict or confusion; (2) living in an inherently temporary or transitional stage which masks the person’s true underlying sexual orientation (presumably homosexual); and (3) employing the label as a method of either consciously denying or unconsciously defending against one’s true homosexual preference’ (Zinik, 1985:9).

Critiques such as this, which challenge dominant definitions of bisexuality, show how the root of many contemporary (mis)conceptions of bisexuality (e.g., as confused, as temporary, as in denial) are rooted within dichotomous understandings and binary models of sexuality. Zinik also explained the logic behind bisexual people being understood as ‘really homosexual’:

‘the “one drop” notion of homosexuality which states that since homosexuality is not something one would choose voluntarily in this culture in the light of the social costs involved, the slightest evidence of it must indicate a deep, predispositional feature of the individual. Thus “one drop” of homosexual behaviour (i.e., even one contact) is taken as evidence of an underlying homosexual orientation’ (Zinik, 1985:10).

Researchers of this era saw problematic understandings as extending outside the ‘scientific community’ to also being located in cultural communities, and wider western culture. Hansen and Evans’ (1985) analysis of the Gay Liberation Movement (GLM), and of conceptual understandings of bisexuality in the media, is insightful in understanding the origins of the notion that bisexual people are confused, unable to make up their minds, or ‘fencesitting’. They drew attention to Klein’s (1978/1980) description of the cultural pressures placed upon bisexual people. Klein had argued that:

‘Many bisexuals today are in danger of choosing heterosexuality or homosexuality, because of the pressure put on them by our culture. Bisexuality is not considered a “normal” possibility by most orthodox psychiatrists. The pathological connotation that’s been put on bisexuality for centuries has become
dogma and has a near-holy place in the traditional psychiatric attitude’ (Klein, 1978/1980, p.70).

Hansen and Evans (1985) stated that the presence of the GLM discouraged bisexual people from identifying as bisexual, and ‘produced pressure to identify with one or the other “side” [homosexual or heterosexual]. As a result, it is unlikely that a bisexual will be willing to identify quickly with (or propound) yet a third-front in this political struggle’ (Hansen & Evans, 1985:2). Zinik (1985) suggested that ‘gay subculture’ conceived negatively of bisexuality:

‘[B]isexuality is sometimes seen as an attempt to have one’s cake and eat it too. Some gay activists view bisexuality as an act of political betrayal. Bisexuals are seen as enjoying the privileges of heterosexual society while at the same time avoiding the stigma of homosexuality’ (p.11).

Hansen and Evans (1985) also drew attention to media portrayals of bisexuality as problematic, particularly the assumption that bisexuality is the result of a confused and conflicted sexual identity development, or a ‘defense’ or denial of ‘true’ heterosexuality or homosexuality. They suggested that such portrayals may result in bisexual people choosing not to identify as bisexual. Similarly, Zinik (1985) suggests that bisexuals may:

‘find themselves in a “double closet”; [whereby] they hide their heterosexual activities from their homosexual peers while at the same time hiding their homosexual activities from their heterosexual peers […] depending on the social context, to avoid embarrassment or ostracism’ (p.11).

It is clear that the work of psychiatrists and psychologists of this era sought to draw attention to the misunderstanding of bisexuality, and highlight the pressure on bisexual people to identify as homosexual or heterosexual. One consequence of bisexual people being fearful of the repercussions of affiliating with the label of bisexual is that it perpetuates the invisibility of bisexuality. When bisexuality is not regarded as a legitimate sexuality then bisexual people are more likely to remain ‘closeted’, which invisibilises them further, and disallows any opportunities for them to even attempt to amend misconceptions around bisexuality.
Part One

Chapter Three: Everyone and everywhere, or no one and nowhere: Two hundred years of conceptualising bisexuality

1990s to current affirmative research on bisexuality

Since the early 1990s, literature from a range of disciplines has strived to understand the lives and experiences of bisexual people. Researchers have also highlighted and interrogated the exclusion of bisexuality. A new place for publishing bisexual material emerged when the Journal of Bisexuality was established in 2000. By having a journal which is dedicated to the topic of bisexuality, bisexual scholars and their allies who write affirmative discussions of bisexuality have a central point through which they can disseminate their work.

Feminist lesbian-identified U.S. sociologist, Paula Rust became interested in bisexuality after she had a relationship with a man, while continuing to identify as a lesbian. She has described how this heightened her awareness of ‘attitudes’ towards bisexuality, and how her interest in the topic coincided with the growth of the bisexual movement in the U.S. (Rust, 1995). In her quantitative questionnaire research, self-identified lesbians and bisexual women answered questions about their ‘attitudes towards sexuality, bisexuality, and bisexual women’ (Rust, 1995:46). She received over 400 responses from lesbian and bisexual women across the U.S. and Canada.

Rust’s findings from her research and her conclusions from her analysis of existing literature have been wide ranging. Like Klein and his peers, she has drawn attention to how dichotomous understandings of sexuality have created a binary model of sexuality, in which bisexuality has no place to exist. Bisexuality troubles binary theories of sexuality by blurring the boundaries between homosexuality and heterosexuality. Rust drew similar conclusions to Blumstein and Schwartz (1976), when she argued there are more possibilities of sexual feeling and experience than there are labels or categories of sexuality. Therefore, categories of sexuality do not capture the range of

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95 However, having a specialised location for discussions of bisexuality may be rather like ‘preaching to the converted’ when trying to address topics of invisibility or biphobia, as there is a risk that the material may not reach a wider audience, unlike publications in less specialised journals.
96 Rust (1995) has stated that she finds it difficult to answer the question of whether she is bisexual, and that she doesn’t define “as” anything other than ‘lesbian-identified’ (p.4, emphasis in original).
97 Rust has also published under the name Paula Rodriguez Rust – Rodriguez being her female partner’s surname.
98 Rust has published results and conclusion from her questionnaire in papers (e.g., Rust, 1992b; 1993a; 1993b; 2001), books (e.g., Rust, 1992a; 1996a; 1996b) and in her own authored book Bisexuality and the challenge to lesbian politics: Sex, loyalty and revolution (Rust, 1995).
human experience, which leads to the problem that ‘sexual identity does not necessarily reflect sexual experience’ (Rust, 1992b:370).

Rust concluded from her research that lesbian and bisexual women differed in their relationships99 (Rust, 1992b; 1995). However, lesbian and bisexual women ‘had almost as much in common as not with respect to their feelings of sexual attraction’ (Rust, 1995:43, emphasis added):

‘Only one-third of lesbians (36%) said that their feelings of sexual attraction were exclusively towards women; two out of three reported that they had some heterosexual feelings. For most, these heterosexual feelings comprised only 10% of their total sexual feelings but some lesbians reported that up to 50% of their feelings of sexual attraction were toward men. Bisexual women, on the other hand, reported feelings that ranged from 80% heterosexual to 90% homosexual. In other words, all bisexual women were attracted to both women and men, but so were most lesbians’ (Rust, 1995:44).

However, their shared attractions and ‘minority’ status did not result in kinship between lesbian and bisexual women. Lesbian participants (regardless of their race, education level, or social class) were sceptical of bisexual women. They expressed negative understandings of bisexual women, as confused, undecided, in transition between heterosexual and lesbian, really lesbian but holding onto their heterosexual privilege and avoiding the stigma of being a lesbian, promiscuous, unable to commit, and as wanting the best of both worlds (Rust, 1995:93). Some of the lesbians in Rust’s research were mistrustful and hateful of, or felt angry towards, bisexual women, and most of the lesbians preferred not to be ‘socially [in the context of a friendship or relationship] or politically associated with bisexual women’ (Rust, 1995:101). Those lesbians who were most politically active were most ‘vocal’ and ‘extreme’ in their opinions (p.121) of bisexuality and bisexual women.

Critically, what also emerged by the mid 1990s were discussions of the concept of biphobia (e.g., Loftus, 1996; Ochs, 1996; Eliason, 1997) which drew attention to the

9955% of lesbians who took part were in a committed relationship with a woman, whereas bisexual women were ‘almost equally likely to be involved with women and men. But only 7 (16%) bisexual women were simultaneously involved with both men and women [...] Most bisexual women described their relationships as serious relationships or marriages’ (Rust, 1995:43).
oppression and marginalisation of bisexual people, and this literature is discussed in more depth in Chapter Six.

Another major study of sexuality was the longitudinal research of mainstream U.S. psychologist Lisa Diamond. In 1998, Diamond interviewed 89 non-heterosexual women aged between 18-25 years of age, recruited through LGB communities and youth groups, and LGB student groups at private and public universities and colleges in New York, with the aim of further understanding women’s sexualities (Diamond, 1998; 2000a; 2000b; 2003; 2005a; 2005c; 2008). Her findings can be used to make some important challenges to the negative and stereotypical understanding of bisexuality.

Diamond conducted telephone interviews with her participants every two years. In her most recent follow up she spoke to 79 of her original participants ‘about their prior and current sexual attractions, behaviors, and identification’ (Diamond, 2008:8). She found that lesbians were consistently more attracted to women, more likely to have sexual behaviour exclusively with women, and less likely to have sexual contact with men than the bisexual participants. However, between 1998 and 2008 ‘67% of participants had changed their identities at least once’ and ‘36% had changed identities more than once’ (Diamond, 2008:9). Although women who were bisexual (or did not label their sexuality) were more likely than lesbian participants to make changes in how they labelled their identities, ‘they were more likely to switch between bisexual and unlabeled identities than to settle on lesbian or heterosexual labels’ (Diamond, 2008:9).

Diamond (2008) has highlighted that her findings can be used to challenge one of the commonly held (mis)conceptions about bisexuality. First, the bisexual (and unlabelled) women who took part were more likely to change between ‘bisexual’ and ‘unlabelled’ than they were to identify as either lesbian, or heterosexual. Hence, there was no evidence that bisexual women were in a transitional stage between heterosexuality and homosexuality. Further, bisexual participants remained less attracted to other women than lesbians were, and instead continued to be attracted to both men and women throughout the ten years of the study. These results have led Diamond (2008) to conclude that bisexuality is a relatively stable identity, distinct from lesbian identity, and that her results would best fit in a ‘third orientation’ and/or a ‘heightened fluidity’ model of bisexuality (rather than a ‘transitional’ model). This heightened fluidity
model suggests 'that most women possess the capacity to experience sexual desires for both sexes, under the right circumstances. Hence, as time goes on, progressively more women should have the opportunity to become aware of this capacity and may adopt bisexual/unlabeled identities as a result' (Diamond, 2008:9).

While Lisa Diamond has challenged one of the negative conceptualisations of bisexuality through the results of her quantitative data, British bisexual psychologist Meg Barker and her colleagues (e.g., Barker, 2004; 2005; 2006; Barker & Yockney, 2004; Ritchie & Barker, 2005; 2006; Barker et al., 2008), have taken a different approach in both their use of mainly qualitative methods, and in how they challenge (mis)conceptions of bisexual people and their (multiple) romantic relationships. In particular they, and others (e.g., Weinberg, Williams & Pryor, 1994; Rust, 1996b, McLean, 2004; Klesse, 2005; 2006; Weitzman, 2006; Barker & Ritchie, 2007), have carved a space within psychology for affirmative discussions of non-monogamies and polyamories, and these are discussed further in Chapter Six.

The establishment of more affirmative understandings

Most recently, Meg Barker (e.g., Barker, 2004; 2006; Barker & Yockney, 2004; Barker & Langdridge, 2008; Barker et al., 2008) and others (e.g., Alexander, 2007; McLean, 2007, 2008a; 2008b; Clarke & Peel, 2007b) have discussed invisibility and the (lack of) inclusivity of bisexuality and bisexual people. They have begun to unpick the specificities of where and how bisexuality is excluded, marginalised, stigmatised and silenced, for example within mainstream mass media and popular culture, and in LGBTQ and mainstream psychology, as well as within LGBT communities and associated events.

In this review of previous literature it is clear that bisexuality has been largely invisible. Researchers have struggled to incorporate bisexuality into their work, and it has often been dismissed or overlooked because it falls outside the mononormative and binary theories of sex, gender, and relationships. However, small bodies of affirmative theory and research have drawn attention to the limitations of binary and continuum models, and challenged misunderstandings of bisexual people and their identity. I use the interviews with bisexual women to discuss these issues further, and to draw in more recent affirmative discussions of bisexual identities.
Methods and Methodology

Introduction

This research uses a predominantly qualitative mixed-methods model, which consists of semi-structured interviews with bisexual women, a quantitative questionnaire with bisexual, lesbian, and heterosexual women, and a qualitative survey with mainly heterosexual young women, to generate data. These methods are deemed the best approach to address my aims of exploring bisexual women’s visual identities and appearances practices, from the standpoint of bisexual women, and individuals of other sexual identities.

In the introduction (Chapter One), I discussed the epistemologies and research approaches which underpin this thesis. Within this, I described my research as broadly located within a feminist, social constructionist, and LGBTQ framework. I outlined how my feminist approach informed my choice of mixed-methods. I also referenced how ‘using the master’s tools’ (Unger, 1996), can be a powerful way in which to conduct feminist research. This chapter explains which methods and methodologies were used for the research and how they were implemented.

The chapter contains five sections. First, I explain how I negotiated the incompatibility of qualitative and quantitative methods and methodologies, through a sequential mixed-methods approach. I then reflect upon my position as an ‘insider’ when conducting interviews with bisexual women. I discuss each of the methods of data collection, which leads into a consideration of using the Internet as part of the research process. Finally, I discuss why thematic analysis was chosen to analyse the interview and survey data.

In later chapters I discuss the procedures of these methods. In Chapter Five I explain the procedure for the interviews with bisexual women, in Chapter Eight I discuss the questionnaire with bisexual, lesbian, and heterosexual women, and in Chapter Nine I outline how the survey with heterosexual students was conducted.
1. Using mixed-methods and methodologies

Qualitative and quantitative research paradigms

In this section, I show how my feminist constructionist perspective led me to reject a simplistic approach to mixing methods. ‘Methods’ are the tools of research, but they stem from associated ‘methodologies’ (e.g., Giddings, 2006), which are underpinned by particular ontologies, epistemologies and philosophies (Creswell & Tashakkori, 2007; Darlaston-Jones, 2007). When methods are understood as embedded within methodologies, then ‘quantitative’ and ‘qualitative’ methods can appear entirely incompatible, due to their differing foundations (e.g., Brannen, 1992a; Bazeley, 2002; Bryman, 2006a; Mason, 2006; Denscombe, 2008).

Researchers who use methods with no consideration of methodologies tend to be located in positivistic, rather than constructionist, research (Giddings, 2006). This approach, which views methods simply as strategies of data collection, allows an unambiguous ‘mixing’ of methods, because all that is required is a qualitative and a quantitative component to the research (e.g., Greene, Caracelli & Graham, 1989; Creswell & Tashakkori, 2007):

‘For those who came from a positivist pragmatic standpoint, the issues concerning mixed-methods research may appear straightforward. The focus is on preparing inclusive protocols that work and can be funded: “Let’s just get on with it”. For qualitative researchers who use methodologies [...] the issues are more complex’ (Giddings, 2006:200, emphasis added).

These complex issues stem from qualitative researchers having drawn from particular philosophical histories, which defied hegemonic quantitative research traditions. Because qualitative research is not taken-for-granted, but rather questioning and critical, it may have fallen to qualitative scholars to be the ones to question the combination of apparently opposing paradigms (Bryman, 2006a; Giddings, 2006).

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100 Ontology is concerned with the nature of reality (Creswell, 2003), (e.g., what constitutes knowledge and what is ‘reality’?). Epistemology is concerned with how to study that ‘reality’ and generate knowledge about it (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998).
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Quantitative perspectives hold a hegemonic position within mainstream psychology, (Bryman, 2006a; Giddings, 2006), where they are both taken-for-granted and dominant within the discipline (Darlaston-Jones, 2007; Morgan, 2007). Quantitative research has its underpinnings in empirical and positivist psychology (Henwood & Pidgeon, 1994; Bazeley, 2002; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Bryman, 2006a; Darlaston-Jones, 2007), which is based on a traditional (and scientific) model (Henwood & Pidgeon, 1994; Bentz & Shapiro, 1998; Darlaston-Jones, 2007), that ‘views reality as universal, objective, and quantifiable’ (Darlaston-Jones, 2007:19). The ontology of positivism is that there is only one reality, which can be measured, and the epistemology is that research requires an objective and value free approach (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Darlaston-Jones, 2007).

In contrast, qualitative research has philosophical rather than scientific underpinnings (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Darlaston-Jones, 2007), and its ontological position is that what is deemed ‘reality’ is inevitably a subjective concept (Darlaston-Jones, 2007). This recognition of the subjective is arguably what makes qualitative research so different from (and deemed incompatible with) quantitative research because:

‘nonpositivistic methods [...] allow people’s perspectives to be uncovered through the search for verstehen (broadly interpreted as “empathetic meaning or understanding”). Such a perspective is premised on the view that qualitative research is fundamentally concerned with interpretation and, thus, that it is crucial to recognize the centrality of the researcher in the process of data generation and analysis’ (Perry, Thurston & Green, 2004:139, emphasis in original).

Despite these differences, quantitative and qualitative methods are commonly used together in the same research project, with various approaches taken to how they can mixed (Gilbert, 2006; Creswell & Tashakkori, 2007; Denscombe, 2008).

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101There is an interesting parallel to be drawn here, whereby it could be argued that positivistic quantitative research is rather like heterosexuality, both in being the dominant position, and in the way that it does not (appear to) require question.

102Although early use of the terms ‘qualitative’ was associated with any research which fell outside the traditional positivist approach (Giddings, 2006; Banks, 2007), as an abstention of the traditional scientific model (Ashworth, 2003). Accordingly it has been argued that qualitative research was marginalised by ‘the quantitative research orthodoxy’ (Bryman, 2006a:113).
The meeting of the method/ologies: Qualitatively driven feminist mixed-methods

In recent years, mixed-methods have been widely accepted, but the combining of them has often overlooked their fundamental difference and incompatibility (Bryman, 2006a; Darlaston-Jones, 2007). I did not, as many mixed-methods researchers do, position myself as a pragmatist
\footnote{Pragmatist frameworks often (though not always) lean towards the more (post)positivistic understandings of method/ologies. Further, many refer to, or rely on, the concept of ‘triangulation’ in order to corroborate quantitative and qualitative findings (Greene et al., 1989; Brannen, 1992; Bryman, 2006a; Bryman, 2006b). In triangulation, one set of results are used to ‘validate’ another (Greene et al., 1989; Bryman, 2006b; Mason, 2006). The concept of using data in this way is based on the aim of two (or more) different types of data being able to confirm ‘the truth’ (Giddings, 2006). Therefore triangulation relies on a model of a ‘single, identifiable, truth revealed by research’ (Gilbert, 2006:212), which is underpinned by positivistic empiricism, and is rather incompatible with social constructionist approaches.} (Bazeley, 2002; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Bryman, 2006a; Giddings, 2006; Denscombe, 2008). Instead, I choose to construct a sequential multi-research model, which I discuss below. Feminist psychologists Louise Kidder and Michelle Fine (1987) offered the following words of caution for those undertaking mixed method/ologies research:

‘Different methods within different paradigms are not simply addressing the same questions differently. Instead, they are addressing different questions, revealing different levels of activity, and leading to different knowledge, interpretations, and explanations’ (Kidder & Fine, 1987, quoted in Tolman & Szalacha, 2004:100, emphasis added).

A sequential design overcomes the incompatibility of qualitative and quantitative research paradigms, because the ‘data collection strategies involve collecting data in an iterative process whereby the data collected in one phase contribute to the data collected in the next’ (Driscoll, Appiah-Yeboah, Salib & Rupert, 2007:21, also see Greene et al., 1989, Creswell, 2003). This approach could be argued to be a ‘multi-research’ model, rather than strictly ‘mixed-methods’, as no ‘mixing’ of methods technically takes place. Quantitative and qualitative data are not gathered simultaneously, therefore it is only possible to take this approach when there is more than one study within a research project (Bryman, 2006b).

What underpins my approach to a sequential design is the concept of using mixed method/ologies in a qualitatively driven way (Brannen, 1992b; Bryman, 2006b; Mason, 2006). Scholars who have used qualitatively driven mixed-methods have recognised
that 'social experience and lived realities are multi-dimensional and [...] our understandings are impoverished and may be inadequate if we view these phenomena only along a single dimension' (Mason, 2006:10). Therefore the use of both quantitative and qualitative approaches is advocated for greater understanding and a more comprehensive account of the phenomenon (Reinharz, 1992; Bryman, 2006b):

‘Feminist researchers combine many methods so as to cast their net as widely as possible in the search for understanding critical issues in women’s lives. The multimethod approach increases the likelihood that researchers will understand what they are studying, and that they will be able to persuade others of the veracity of their findings (Reinharz, 1992:201).

My qualitative framework embraces the advantages of mixed-methods, but remains led by feminist, constructionist and LGBTQ approaches. In this thesis, each stage of research addresses different aims, for which the depth of qualitative research method/ologies, or the breadth of quantitative method/ologies, are most appropriate.

By drawing on mixed-method/ologies I hope to gain a meaningful understanding of the topic of bisexual women’s visual identities, and to meet my aims and answer my research questions. As outlined in the introduction, a key aim is to explore whether, or how, bisexual women construct their visual identities in relation to their sexual identity. Because there is such minimal previous research or theory, this is a virtually unexplored area, for which a qualitative interview study with bisexual women is most appropriate, in order to gain rich in-depth understandings about bisexual identities and appearance.

The interviews revealed that these bisexual women discussed their visual identity in relation to heterosexual and lesbian women’s appearance. Therefore, the next ‘sequence’ of research is a quantitative questionnaire, which allows an investigation of lesbian, heterosexual, and bisexual women. This best addresses my second aim of situating bisexual women within a wider context, by making comparisons across other sexual identities. The quantitative questionnaire also makes it possible to gain additional data on exactly how bisexual women manage their appearance, with a far larger sample.
In the final part of my research the scope is broadened again, to meet the aim of investigating whether different sexualities can be read from the (outsider) perspective of young (predominantly) heterosexual people. This will provide insight into how heterosexual people broadly understand visual sexual identities, as well as specifically providing another perspective from which bisexual people’s (visual) identities can be considered. Exploration of this is entirely novel and so an exploratory qualitative framework is most appropriate. Therefore I developed a qualitative survey, distributed to heterosexual students, which contained questions about appearance norms and sexual identity.
2. Locating the researcher within the research

A key part of feminist research is a focus on acknowledging the researcher as a part of the research (e.g., Oakley, 1983/1990; Stanley & Wise, 1990; Unger, 1996). Giddings (2006), describes researchers as inherently in possession of an ‘embodied understanding of research [which] is shaped by their unique contexts – cultural, social, political, economic and so on’ (p200). It was important to be aware of, and reflect upon, my position as a researcher. I recognise the terms ‘feminist’, ‘bisexual’ and ‘woman’ as making a key contribution to my personal identity. Social constructionist, LGBTQ, and feminist psychology seemed most synchronous with my research position, my personal values as a researcher, and with the topic of bisexual women’s identities (as discussed in Chapter One). I turn now to outline the strengths and complexities of insider-outsider perspectives.

Insider-outsider perspectives

Traditionally, beginning with the work of the early sexologists, homosexuality research was located within a positivistic framework. The researcher was conceived of as an expert, and the lesbians and gay men who were the ‘subjects’ of research were ‘othered’ as sick or perverted (Kong, Mahoney & Plummer, 2002). This othering is also exemplified in the way that academia has traditionally seen ‘race, gender, and sex as white, male, and heterosexual’ (Kanuha, 2000:439; see also, Griffith, 1998).

However, through the rise of the lesbian and gay movement in the 1960s (see Chapters Two and Three), gay men and lesbians began to ‘come out’. By the 1970s (when homosexuality per se was removed from the American Psychological Association’s Diagnostic and Statistical Manual), self-identified gay researchers began to be involved with affirmative homosexuality research, which disrupted the ‘old split between subject/researcher and the object/researched’ (Kong et al., 2002:243). At around the same time, feminist researchers had begun to encourage reflexivity on the relationship between ‘us’ as researchers, and ‘them’ as participants (Oakley, 1983/1990; Stanley & Wise, 1993, Kong et al., 2002). The notion of reflexivity has also been taken up more widely, particularly by academics that have some form of marginal status themselves, including not only feminists, but also those with marginalised sexualities (e.g., Griffith, 1998; Kanuha, 2000; Kong, et al., 2002).
What has emerged from this reflexivity is the recognition of the ‘native, indigenous, or insider researcher’ (Kanuha, 2000:440). I considered myself primarily an ‘insider’ in this research, because both I and my participants had our bisexual identity and our gender in common. Other similarities between myself and (some of) the participants included social class (middle), age (mid-twenties to mid-thirties) and race (White British). Therefore my position was often an emic one; in many ways I was ‘one of them’ and therefore more likely to share similar viewpoints to those of my participants (e.g., Kanuha, 2000, LaSala, 2003; Perry et al., 2004). I was deeply immersed in the research through my subjective position (Kanuha, 2000) and had a deeply personal interest in the topic of bisexuality.

There are a number of ways, identified in the literature, in which insider researchers, particularly when they disclose their position as insider104 (Perry et al., 2004), hold an advantageous and privileged position (e.g., Kanuha, 2000; Labaree, 2002; LaSala, 2003). During the development of an interview-schedule, insiders arguably have an advantage in knowing what sorts of questions to ask (e.g., Griffith, 1998; Miller & Glassner, 1998; Labaree, 2002). The insider holds a ‘personal familiarity with issues affecting their respondents’ lives [which] may enable them to formulate research questions [...] which may not occur to outsiders’ (LaSala, 2003:17).

Insiders can find and access participants more easily than outsiders, through friendship networks, subsequent snowball sampling, and through social networks or groups more widely, of which the insider is more likely to be aware (Platzer & James, 1997; Labaree, 2002; LaSala, 2003). Furthermore, participants who are members of stigmatised or disempowered groups (such as bisexual women), may consider those who wish to conduct research about them as an intrusion, unless the researcher is also a member of that same community (Platzer & James, 1997; Bridges, 2001; Labaree, 2002; LaSala, 2003; Perry et al., 2004). Participants are more likely to trust the motives of the insider researcher, and therefore be willing to participate (Platzer & James, 1997; Bridges, 2001; Labaree, 2002; LaSala, 2003; Perry et al., 2004). For example, in Michael LaSala’s research with gay men in the U.S., participants made it explicitly clear to him that they

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104 Some aspects of insider status may be visible and therefore need no declaration. Other aspects (sometimes including sexuality), may specifically require disclosure. All my participants were aware of my gender and sexuality, either through prior knowledge (within my friendship networks and women recruited through snowball sampling), or through self-disclosing during phone or email contact prior to the interview. I also ‘outed’ myself in my information sheet (see, Appendix 18).
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had taken part precisely because they believed that as a fellow gay man he ‘could be
trusted to accurately portray their lives’ (LaSala, 2003:18, see also Dunne, 1997;
Kitzinger, 1987).

Insider status also plays a part during data collection (Miller & Glassner, 1998;
Labaree, 2002; LaSala, 2003; Corbin-Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). When the researcher is a
part of the same (marginalised) group as those being researched, this ensures that
participants’ interests are kept at the top of the research agenda, because the
researcher is more likely to both be aware of, and share, these interests (e.g., Griffith,
1998). Participants may also believe that as an insider, the researcher will want to
improve the understanding of the group and ‘rectify social misconceptions’ (LaSala,
2003:18).

Feminist researchers (among the first of whom was Oakley, 1983/1990), have argued
that there are often unequal power relations within interview settings (Hollway &
Jefferson, 2000). When women interview women this holds the potential to break
down the boundaries of these hierarchies (e.g., DeVault, 1996; Hollway & Jefferson,
2000; Labaree, 2002). Further, it has been argued that through empathy (e.g.,
Hellawell, 2006), implicit understanding, and shared experience (Labaree, 2002), it is
easier to gain the trust of the participants, who will engage more fully with the
research which can facilitate the development of rapport (e.g., Platzer & James, 1997;
Labaree, 2002; LaSala, 2003; Perry et al., 2004), and in turn is more likely to result in
rich and authentic accounts (Perry et al., 2004).

This rich data, and the insider’s strong position in understanding and making sense of
participants’ worlds (e.g., Griffith, 1998; Bridges, 2001; Labaree, 2002), can result in a
more ‘complete knowledge’ (Griffith, 1998:363). This knowledge, deeper
understanding, and culturally specific interpretation can be utilised by the insider both
during the data collection, and analysis stages of the research, in order to produce
deep and authentic findings (e.g., Labaree, 2002; Perry et al., 2004, Corbin-Dwyer &
Buckle, 2009).

However, there are also numerous challenges associated with the breaking down of
the researcher/researched boundaries, which has implications for both participant and
researcher (Kanuha, 2000; Bridges, 2001; Labaree, 2002; LaSala, 2003). There may be a
responsibility inadvertently placed on the shoulders of insider researchers, by
participants, whose expectation is that the researcher will produce knowledge that represents (and betters), the lives of that group (Kanuha, 2000). Further, the researcher may have difficulty in knowing how to respond when treated by participants as a friend or counsellor (e.g., Birch & Miller, 2000). The participant may over disclose beyond their level of comfort due to the ‘ease with which women can get women to talk about private [...] aspects of their lives’ (Platzer & James, 1997:631).

Participants may respond to a researcher who is ‘on the inside’ by making the assumption that shared knowledge is intrinsically understood (Kanuha, 2000). This assumption of shared knowledge can be problematic, because the participant’s narrative may be misconstrued or misunderstood by the researcher. An assumption of a shared understanding may mean that participants leave unfinished sentences, which do not contribute to the data (Kanuha, 2000), and it is possible that insiders overlook interesting aspects of the data, as they may unintentionally neglect topics which fall outside of their lived experience (LaSala, 2003, Perry et al., 2004). Therefore, some have argued that outsiders may actually be in a better position to be able to see what an insider may take for granted (Griffith, 1998; Kanuha, 2000; LaSala, 2003; Perry et al., 2004).

For these reasons, it was critical that I reflected on my insider status. I did so by constantly considering my position as an insider, during data collection, transcription, and analysis. I hoped that by doing so I was able to avoid the overlooking of interesting findings in the data (Kanuha, 2000; LaSala, 2003). This process was aided by asking other PhD students, and academics (Dr. Victoria Clarke, Dr. Helen Malson), to look over the interview transcripts during analysis (e.g., Perry et al., 2004).

However, it has been suggested that to argue for the privileged position of the insider researcher is overly simplistic (Labaree, 2002; Corbin-Dwyer & Buckle, 2009), and that a more nuanced reflection on ‘the complex nature of relationships between the researcher and the informant’ is necessary (Labaree, 2002:103). Part of my reflexive process was to consider how ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’ are not simplistic or mutually exclusive categories that exist in isolation of anything in between (e.g., DeVault, 1996; Bridges, 2001; Labaree, 2002; Hellawell, 2006; Corbin-Dwyer & Buckle, 2009; see also, discussions of intersectionality, e.g., Crenshaw, 1993; Fish, 2008). The researcher/researchee boundary cannot be completely obliterated even when we are a member of the same stigmatised group(s). Although it is acknowledged that both participants
and researcher contribute to the data which is produced (e.g., Clarke, Kitzinger & Potter, 2004), nonetheless, we remain always researcher/researched. Therefore, integral to the position of conducting research is ‘an artificial officiousness [...] attached to [the] [...] researcher role’ (Kanuha, 2000:443).

Another consideration is that we are often as different from our participants as we are similar. Our difference may produce as many boundaries as our commonalties overcome. There were characteristics which sometimes (but not always), positioned me as an outsider. I am a white, middle-class woman, in a long-term, cohabiting, monogamous relationship with a man. My participants included non-white, working, or upper class women, whose relationship statuses sometimes differed from mine (e.g., they were single, in a relationship with a woman, or in polyamorous relationships). Further, because of the focus on appearance, dress and body size was also a consideration. There were also ‘grey areas’ for example, although I reside in an urban location, I grew up in a rural area. All of these aspects\(^{105}\) and others were relevant in my interviews with these bisexual women.

The intricacies of being both an insider and an outsider meant that it was necessary to reflect on my multiple positionalities as a researcher, and consider both my involvement with, as well as my detachment from, my own research (e.g., Labaree, 2002; Perry et al., 2004). In summary, my aim, in relation to my position as a researcher, was to recognise how insider status could enable a deeper understanding of the women to whom I spoke, without my knowledge and personal experience dominating participants’ stories with my own agenda and reactions (Tolman & Szalacha, 2004). I considered the implications of my position as an insider before the interviews, and was mindful of it throughout the research.

\(^{105}\) Some aspects were more noticeable, or applicable, than others. For example, although body size was little discussed, it was not something which could be hidden from each others’ view. Size was brought into the conversation by some participants, one of whom emphasised that my body was smaller than hers. Another example was a participant who lived in a hamlet, who drew on her rural location as relevant to aspects of her and her partner’s ‘outness’. She did so with no awareness my having lived in a rural location. All these (and other) nuances entered into the interviews and fed into the complexity of the researcher/researched relationship.
3. The Methods

In this section I outline the reasons for choosing semi-structured, face-to-face, one-on-one interviews, an online quantitative questionnaire, and a short paper and pen/Internet based qualitative survey. I also include a discussion of photo methodologies, which were used alongside the interviews.

**Interviews and photo methodology**

There is little existing research on bisexual women's visual identities (see Chapter One), and as such I chose interviews as the best method in order to qualitatively explore bisexual women's subjective understandings and experiences of how they construct their visual identities, in relation to their bisexuality.

In these interviews I was not seeking 'the truth' about how bisexual women construct and manage their visual and wider identities (see, for example, Clarke, 2000; Cosgrove, 2000; Lafrance & Stoppard, 2006; Sandfield, 2006). Instead my interest was in gleaning rich and contextual data from bisexual women's accounts, which might proffer insights into how they conceive of their visual identity, in relation to their bisexual identity. Their 'stories' may also potentially make visible, and offer opportunities to challenge, dominant understandings of the marginalised (and socially constructed) category of bisexuality (e.g., Cosgrove, 2000; Lafrance & Stoppard, 2006).

**Visual methodologies**

Within psychology the spoken word has tended to be privileged over the use of visual tools. However, more recently there has been an increased interest in visual methodologies within the field (Frith, Riley, Archer & Gleeson, 2005), including their use within some feminist research projects (e.g., Frith & Harcourt, 2007; Majumdar, 2007). It seemed logical that a visual methodology would correspond well in the exploration of visual identity. The women's visual worlds could be brought to life through photographs (for example of clothes, social spaces, or theirs and others' appearance) because the visual is far more accessible through images, than through words (Banks, 2007).

However, surprisingly, very little appearance research has utilised visual methodologies as part of their studies (with the exception of Holliday, 1999, who asked participants to keep video diaries in her sociology research of queer identities).
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The use of visual methodology within this thesis allows an opportunity to utilise an exploratory and innovative method of data collection. There are a number of sources which can be used in visual methodologies. I chose to use photographs as a method to enhance the verbal content of the data, and the women were invited to include personal pictures to accompany their personal narratives. Photographs were chosen because it was considered that they would be less daunting, and less likely to discourage participants from taking part, than videos. Although most people are familiar with cameras and photographs (e.g., Harrison, 2004), taking photographs may still have daunted some of the women and so it was decided to give each participant the choice of whether or not they took (or included pre-existing) photographs to accompany their interview. Disposable cameras were easy to post to participants anywhere in the country and were portable and simple to use.

Little has been documented on incorporating photographs into interview based research (Hurworth, 2003). However, more recently there are some resources which refer to visual and photograph methods (e.g., Pole, 2004; Frith et al., 2005; Lynn & Lea, 2005; Banks, 2007). The first use of the term ‘photo-elicitation’ is attributed to Collier (1957) (see Clark- Ibáñez, 2004; Frith & Harcourt, 2007; Harper, 2002; Heisley & Levy, 1991; Hurworth, 2003), and can be loosely defined as the use of photographs within research as a stimulus, or ‘data generator’, in order to provoke a response, or prompt a potentially richer in-depth interview. The technique I use is ‘auto-driving’, which is a specific form of photo-elicitation where photographs are taken by the interviewees, and not the researcher (e.g., Hurworth, 2003; Banks, 2007). This particular use of photo methodologies does not necessitate that the photographs are analysed separately, instead they are a tool to accompany the spoken data. The photographs are used within the interview in order to encourage talk (Banks, 2007), and provide a focus for discussion (Heisley & Levy, 1991; Banks, 2007).

Researchers who have previously used photograph based visual methods advocate that there are numerous advantages in their use (e.g., Schwartz, 1989; Heisley & Levy, 1991; Harper, 2002; Hurworth, 2003; Banks, 2007; Frith & Harcourt, 2007). Photographs can overcome some of the limitations of the researcher constructed interview-schedule. Although semi-structured, the interview-schedule was based on questions which were informed and developed by my perspective as a bisexual woman, and the small body of previous sexuality and appearance research.
photographs are a particularly useful way to broaden the scope of the interview content (e.g., Heisley & Levy, 1991; Frith et al., 2005), because they may allow a more participant led interview which can provide new understandings and unpredicted information (Hurworth, 2003). Photographs hold the potential to extend personal narratives, illuminating the viewers’ lives and experiences (Schwartz, 1989). Furthermore the interview can be based on the discussion on ‘the authority of the subject (sic) rather than the researcher’ (Harper, 2002:15), who can ‘present what they consider important’ (Frith et al., 2005:190), hence the process can be empowering for participants (Heisely & Levy, 1991:260). This fits well with a feminist epistemology where the breaking down of the researcher/researched boundaries is advocated (e.g., Mishler, 1991).

The photographs can provide a shared focus, which means that the interviewee and interviewer can both use photographs as a kind of neutral third party. Hence the shared focus of the photograph can eliminate hesitation, and encourages broader and more in depth responses (Schwartz, 1989; Harper, 2002; Banks, 2007). Further, ‘awkward silences can be covered as both look at the photographs [which] always provides something to talk about’ (Banks, 2007:65-66). Thus this is another way in which photographs may aid in creating a richer quantity of data, and a richer quality of data (Harper, 2002, Frith & Harcourt 2007). Furthermore, photo-elicitation has been utilised across disciplines for discussion around ‘more difficult, abstract concepts’ (Curry & Strauss, 1994; Bender, Harbour, Thorp & Morris, 2001), which bisexual visual identity may well prove to be. I reflect on the use of the photographs within the final discussion and conclusion.

**Quantitative Questionnaire**

As discussed in the introduction, and above, a quantitative questionnaire was chosen from a feminist perspective, as to include traditional research methods within a project can be thought of as using ‘the master’s tools’ (e.g., Unger, 1996; Rutherford, 2007). Questionnaires are a useful form of data collection which have been well utilised within both feminist, and LGBTQ psychology (e.g., Fish, 1999; Morris & Rothblum, 1999; Eisenbergera & Wechslera, 2003; Bos, van Balen, Boom & Sandfort, 2004; Yip, 2004; Fiissel & Lafreniere, 2006; Rothblum, 2007). Questionnaires are useful in order to gain breadth, and make comparisons between groups. However, what has
sometimes been lacking in many of these questionnaires is the meaningful inclusion of bisexual (and trans) people.

**Surveys**

In the final stage of the research the aim was to explore more widely the concept of visual identity. The aim of this survey was to widen the scope of the research in order to understand whether (mainly) young heterosexual men and women could read other people’s sexuality through their appearance. Because so little previous research has asked heterosexual people whether they can read others’ sexuality from how they dress and appear (see Chapter Nine), an exploratory qualitative approach was considered most appropriate in order to meet the aims.

Qualitative *interviews* are a well documented method of research, but there is far less writing on qualitative *surveys*, with most research methods handbooks tending to refer only to *quantitative surveys/questionnaires* (e.g., Brannen, 1992; Creswell, 2003). However, qualitative researchers have begun to recognise the value of qualitative survey methods (e.g., Frith & Gleeson, 2004; Toerien & Wilkinson, 2004).

It was felt that students would be most comfortable filling out a survey, which allowed them to take part anonymously, and without the researcher present. A survey was also chosen over interviews partly due to the sensitive topic, and partly because students may have found it difficult to engage with commenting upon a group to which they (mostly) did not belong in a face-to-face interview. Further, I wanted to ask only a small number of questions, thus a short survey was more suitable than a method such as interviews.

Surveys have been advocated in the enabling a ‘wide-angled’ and broad view of a particular phenomenon, particularly in new areas of investigation (Toerien & Wilkinson, 2004). I wanted to ask a large number of students about sexuality and appearance, in part because this had not been researched before, but also in order to gain a wide range of opinions. It is more practical to ask lots of participants to fill out a short survey in order to gain a wide range of responses, than it is to use other qualitative methods (e.g., interviews, diary studies, or focus groups) (Toerien & Wilkinson, 2004), which would require far more resources and time both to conduct and analyse.
4. Introducing Internet research

Both the quantitative questionnaire and the qualitative survey\textsuperscript{106} were distributed online. The Internet is accessible to increasing numbers of people (Buchanan & Smith, 1999), and has become a commonly used research tool within psychology (see discussions in Buchanan & Smith, 1999; Mann & Stewart, 2004; Hewson, 2005; Harding & Peel, 2007). In particular, the Internet has been successfully utilised in research within both feminist and LGBTQ psychology (e.g., Fish, 1999; Harding & Peel, 2007; Jowett & Peel, 2009; Pitts, Couch, Mulcare, Croy & Mitchell, 2009).

For both the questionnaire and the survey, questionnaire development services (Harding & Peel, 2007), were used to create online versions. The Internet versions were identical in content to the paper versions, and generated website addresses which participants visited in order to fill them out. Recruitment (which I discuss in Chapters Eight and Nine) is easier through online versions (Buchanan & Smith, 1999; Hewson, 2005; Harding & Peel, 2007), because the researcher is able to reach much larger (and potentially more diverse) samples, and allow data to be gathered quickly and easily (Harding & Peel, 2007; Jowett & Peel, 2009). Once the survey was converted, there was no need to print, distribute or collect paper copies (Buchanan & Smith, 1999; Hewson, 2005). This is both ‘environmentally friendly’, and reduces the time spent on data entry because results can be downloaded into a Microsoft Excel document (Buchanan & Smith, 1999; Hewson, 2005; Harding & Peel, 2007).

Internet research is also advantageous because participants may feel more anonymous at a computer screen than in person (e.g., Hewson, 2005; Harding & Peel, 2007; Jowett & Peel, 2009). However, due to the public realm of the Internet, there are often greater issues of participant ethics in relation to privacy, confidentiality and anonymity (Buchanan & Smith, 1999; Mann & Stewart, 2004; Hewson, 2005). This was easily managed because the UWE software, and SurveyMonkey satisfy the requirements and standards of the Data Protection Act and are approved by UWE as an appropriate online research tool (A. Vaughton, UWE email communication, April 27\textsuperscript{th}, 2010).

\textsuperscript{106}The questionnaire was originally in paper format, which was distributed at Birmingham Pride. However, no responses were returned, and after this only the online version was used to gather data. There were paper and pen and an online version of the survey, and I detail these in Chapter Nine.
5. Data Analysis

Thematic analysis

The topic of bisexual women’s visual identities is severely underexplored, and my priority was in gaining an overall picture of how they, and others, understood bisexual (visual) identity. Therefore, thematic analysis was chosen as a way to broadly represent the bisexual women’s talk from interviews with them, and to present the student’s general understandings of sexuality and appearance.

Thematic analysis identifies common patterns or themes within qualitative text, and has been described as ‘the most common approach to analysis of data’ (Roulson, 2001:280). Numerous studies across psychology, sociology, health and social work, and in education and law (Boyatzis 1998:viii) have utilised this method of analysis. The suitability of thematic analysis in this particular research is supported by its common usage with interviews and focus group data (e.g., Farvid & Braun, 2006; Frith, Harcourt & Fussell, 2007; Harcourt & Frith, 2008). Therefore, a deductive interpretative thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was chosen as the most appropriate method of analysis. In the next chapters I discuss the procedures of using these methods, the data collection, the recruitment, and the specificities of how I approached my thematic analysis of the data.

However, Kitzinger & Wilkinson (1997) draw attention to how research which attempts to become a ‘conduit’ of women’s experiences can be problematic. Sometimes participants may say things that we do not want to hear (e.g., lesbians describing themselves as sick, for example), or that presents our participants in an unfavourable light, which can make the researcher uncertain of ‘what to do’ with this data. While I am keen not to lose the women’s voices, I keep in mind their observations that ‘representing’ women can be problematic.
Conducting Semi-Structured Face to Face Interviews with Bisexual Women

Introduction

In the previous methodology chapter I outlined my choice of methods and methodologies. In this brief chapter I turn to the utilisation of these methods when interviewing bisexual women. I discuss the development, recruitment, and procedural aspects of the interviews, before reporting the demographics of the participants, and the process of analysis.

Development of the interview schedule

It was anticipated that participants may find the topic difficult to talk about (see Clarke & Turner, 2007), and for this reason a structured interview schedule which might constrain the women’s talk (Wilkinson, Joffe & Yardley, 2004) was rejected. However, some structure was required to keep participants focused (see discussion in Roulston, deMarrais & Lewis, 2003), on the topic of appearance and sexuality.

Questions were developed, which asked the women about how they managed their own appearance, and in what ways they understood theirs and others’ appearance in relation to bi/sexuality. The interview schedule was developed on the basis of previous literature, my own experiences as a bisexual woman, who has had some involvement with both LGBT and bisexual communities, and my own interests in researching the topic. It was divided into main topic areas, and structured with least personal questions at the beginning to ease participants into talking (e.g., Smith, 2003), and to allow them to become accustomed to the ‘strangeness’ of the interview situation and the presence of the audio recorder.

The schedule (see Appendix 1F) included questions about clothes/clothing practices, hair/body hair, tattoos, piercings and broader styling and grooming practices in relation to bisexual identity (e.g., ‘Can you tell me about your body hair practices/Do you think you try and look bi, and communicate your sexuality to the world?’). I also asked the women if their appearance changed when they first identified as bisexual, how open they were about their bisexuality, and whether their friendships and relationships influenced their appearance (e.g., ‘Did your appearance change when
you were coming out? Is your appearance affected by your partner, or the relationship that you’re in?).

Lesbian and gay space has been recognised as a site where particular appearance norms are likely to be most apparent and adhered to (e.g., Rothblum, 1994a; Luzzatto & Gvion, 2004). Bisexual women may be part of both lesbian and gay space, and/or more specific bisexual spaces, such as the annual bisexual conference (Bicon), which around 200 people attend (Barker, Bowes-Catton, Iantaffi, Cassidy & Brewer, 2008), and smaller bisexual events known as BiFests held in various locations around the U.K. during the year. Therefore I asked the women about lesbian and gay men’s visual appearance and their experiences of lesbian and/or bisexual communities (e.g., ‘Are you involved in any bi communities or involved in the lesbian and gay ‘scene’? Are you aware of any ideas or stereotypes around what lesbians and gay men look like? How would you dress when going out on in bi space/the scene?’). This meant that the answers they provided about themselves were often situated within the context of a wider understanding of sexual identity and appearance rather than bisexual visual identity alone, which allowed multiple ways in which bi/sexuality and appearance could be spoken about.

**Pilot**

After UWE ethical approval was granted (FAS713), my Director of Studies (VC) interviewed me, in order to trial the interview schedule, which aided in its development. This pilot interview also served as a tool to enable me to reflect upon and convey my thoughts about bisexuality and appearance. Being an interviewee provided me with a sense of what it was like to participate in my research, which allowed me to have greater empathy with my participants as part of my own reflexive process.

**Preparing the photo information sheet**

Participants in this study were given the choice of whether or not to use photographs and it was made clear that an interview alone was also extremely valued, allowing participants to take part even if they did not wish to engage with taking photographs.

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108 This interview was not included in the analysis because by the end of the project my own appearance, and my beliefs and understandings about bisexual visual identity had evolved.
Participants were given control over their photographs, and were asked to select which (if any) they would be willing to let me use in conference papers, or in publications, including my thesis.

In order to allow the most participant based responses, the task was left open, with participants being given guidelines (see Appendix 1C) which advised them that they could take (or include pre-existing) photographs of whatever they chose, as long as they related to bisexuality in some way. These instructions construed that the photographs could be a fun task, and were simply a tool for discussion. Therefore it was hoped that participants would not worry or feel pressured by the task. While it was important to include some instructions that kept participants focused, these were ambiguous enough to allow interviewees agency in the task, allowing for a wider range of responses.

By asking participants to take their own photographs, I was able to be relatively unobtrusive (Frith & Harcourt 2007). In terms of the cost, disposable cameras were purchased and sent to participants. These included free development at certain stores, overcoming any financial burden to participants, and putting them in control of their own photographs, by letting them undergo an editing process before sharing them.

Assessing the interview schedule

After four interviews had been conducted, one of my supervisors (HM) and I read and discussed the interviews. The interview schedule was slightly altered as a result of this (see Appendix 1G). Questions about friendship were removed as the interviews were lasting for up to two and half hours (taking more of the women’s time than anticipated), and it was felt that the talk around friendship and appearance was not revealing any important information about the women’s visual identities.

After thirteen interviews the recruitment strategy was altered to recruit women who were members of bisexual communities (see below). The opportunity was taken for the questions to be reassessed and altered to refine and develop the schedule (see Appendix 1H). The women who had taken part so far had spoken about their own, and wider understandings of bisexual identity without being prompted. Their discussions were interesting and revealing, and therefore broader questions about the topic of identity were included in the final version of the interview schedule.
Recruitment

The aim was to recruit fifteen to twenty women who self-identified as bisexual. This would allow enough data to capture themes and patterns, but not so much that the women's individual accounts became lost. The sample was a convenience sample, but I tried to vary the recruitment strategy rather than relying on a single method, to ensure that a range of bisexual women took part. Access to the 'hidden population' of bisexual women was gained in three ways, all of which are well recognised strategies within qualitative and LGBTQ research (e.g., Fish, 1999; Morris & Rothblum, 1999; Rothblum, 2007). Firstly a snowball technique was utilised (e.g., Dunne, 1997; Gubrium & Holstein, 2002), which is a particularly appropriate method of recruitment when the group is known to be either hidden, hard to find and/or rare (Renzetti & Lee, 1993a; 1993b). My personal contacts were the first to take part, and they asked their bisexual friends if they were willing to participate. This resulted in 6 participants.

The second recruitment method was a call for participants. An advertisement (see Appendix 1A) was placed in the Spring Issue of the local quarterly free magazine The Spark, an independent ethical quarterly magazine. While readership is mainly around the urban locations of Bath and Bristol, the magazine does cover a wider area including smaller towns and villages in Somerset, Gloucestershire and Wiltshire. When the call for participants was placed, The Spark distributed 32,000 copies, and estimated that its readership of 29,000 consisted of 70% women, making it an excellent means of recruitment for this research. The magazine is free, and is distributed to libraries, community centres, colleges and schools, cafes, city farms, galleries, theatres and health food shops (http://www.thespark.co.uk). This strategy proved successful, generating a further 7 interviews. After the initial 12 interviews had taken place, no more responses were generated by the advert.

These recruitment strategies were not reaching women who were members of bisexual communities (only one participant had been aware of the existence of such spaces). Therefore a purposive recruitment strategy was utilised to recruit women who had some involvement with a bisexual community (e.g., local bisexual groups and/or national bisexual community events). This was considered important because previous literature on lesbians and gay men indicated that community space is a site

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109 A further 2 bisexual women had expressed an interest directly from The Spark but chose not to reply after initial contact.
where appearance norms are particularly relevant (see Chapter One). BiCon 2008 was attended and flyers handed out. Although this only resulted in 2 interviews\textsuperscript{110}, further snowballing meant that another 4 women were interviewed as a result of this strategy. Shortly afterwards a call for participants was placed in Bi Community News (BCN) a bi-monthly publication for bisexual people. This generated only one more participant, although some of the women recruited through the later snowball sampling also mentioned having seen the advert. Through initial analysis of the interviews it seemed that no new ideas were being generated through the latest interviews, and so this was considered an appropriate number at which to stop recruitment.

**Procedure**

When participants contacted me and expressed an interest in taking part they were posted or emailed an information sheet (see Appendix 1B), and instructions on how they could take (or include) photographs (see Appendix 1C). It was made clear to participants that their participation was greatly valued regardless of whether they engaged in the photograph task.

Dates and meeting places were arranged via email or phone, at a time and location which best suited the participant. Seventeen of the interviews took place in participant’s homes, two in cafes, and one in a workplace meeting room. At the beginning of the interview the consent form (see Appendix 1D) was introduced for participants to read and sign. They were explicitly told that they could withdraw at any time (within a certain time constraint) without having to give a reason, and that the interview could be stopped at any time, either for a break, or entirely. If photographs were included, participants were asked which they were happy for me to use, and in what ways (e.g., presentations, reports, publications).

Thirteen of the 20 participants used photographs in their interviews. Although disposable cameras were sent to all 13 of these participants, only 4 of the women used them. The rest chose pre-existing photographs, many of which were on their computers, or on photo hosting/social networking websites. A further 2 participants had indicated that they would take photographs, but one had found the task too

\textsuperscript{110}A further 3 women had specifically expressed an interest at BiCon, but chose not to respond to emails sent after the event.
difficult, and the other had not found the time. Of those who included their
photographs, 8 were willing for all their pictures to be used, one selected which I could
use, and another agreed that they could be used as long as they were anonymised.
One participant used their photographs in the interview, but did not wish for them to
be used in my thesis or elsewhere. Two participants had commented that they were
happy for me to use their photographs, but never sent them to me.

The women were also asked to complete a short demographic questionnaire (see
Appendix 1E), so that I had a profile of each respondent, and a ‘picture’ of the overall
sample. This consisted of mainly closed questions but to allow participants some
agency in what information they felt was important to provide me with, the final
open-ended question asked participants to list 5 words to describe themselves.

Participants were told in advance that the interviews would be recorded using a digital
voice recorder. Before recording began, participants chose their pseudonym, which it
was hoped would be an empowering and fun task. The women appeared to enjoy
choosing their pseudonym, although 2 women were keen to make clear that I could
use their actual names. I chose not to for reasons of consistency across the sample.
Comfort breaks were taken during some interviews. The length of the interviews
ranged from 43 minutes to two and a half hours, with a mean duration of 92 minutes.
In order to consider my position as a researcher, and to reflect upon the research
process, I wrote short reflections on the relationship between myself and the
participant. However, due to the confidentiality of these, and the public accessibility of
PhD theses, I do not include them.

Demographics

Overall the picture was that the women were ‘the usual suspects’ of LGBTQ research,
in that they were mainly white, middle class, and well educated; however there is
some variation in their demographic details (see Appendix 1I).

Participant’s age ranged from 19 to 53, with a mean of 33. All participants were
white\textsuperscript{111} (British/European/Welsh/Irish), with the exception of one who identified as

\textsuperscript{111}One participant declined to answer the question regarding ethnicity.
Black British. Fifteen participants described themselves as middle class\textsuperscript{112}, 3 as working class, and one as upper class\textsuperscript{113}. Three identified themselves as having a disability, which they described as diabetes, dyslexia, and bipolar disorder.

In the main, participants were in full time employment (13), and of these one was also a part-time student. Three participants worked part-time, and one of these was also a part-time student. There was one full time student (hence a total of 3 were currently students). Of the remainder, one was retired and 2 were unemployed. In terms of highest educational level (achieved or currently studying), 6 were at postgraduate level, 9 degree level, 2 HND/Professional Qualifications, one A-Level, and 2 GCSE/O Level.

The age at which they had first identified as bisexual ranged from 11 to 36 with a mean age of 20. The length of time since they had first identified themselves as bisexual ranged from one year to 36 years (although some participants also responded that they had ‘always’ identified as bisexual) with a mean of 13 years. Participants were asked whether they were ‘very out’, ‘mostly out’ or ‘not very out’. Ten described themselves as very out, 9 as mostly out, and one wrote that she was both ‘very out’ and ‘not very out’, depending on the person.

Thirteen women had no association with any form of bisexual community and 7 did. Thirteen of the women had chosen to include photographs in their interviews (7 of the non-community involved participants, 6 of the community involved women). The women who were not community involved seemed to have found the photograph task challenging. When I became aware of this, I made it even clearer during email conversations preceding interviews that the task was designed to be fun, and not to feel obliged to take part if they were not comfortable to do so. I reflect on the use of photo elicitation further in Chapter Ten.

Eighteen of the women were in a relationship. Nine were with a man, 6 with a woman, and the remaining 3 were currently with more than one partner/identified as

\textsuperscript{112} Of the 15 self defined middle class women, 3 used the term ‘lower’ middle class and one ‘upper’ middle class. Two of the middle class participants were keen to make known their working class backgrounds.

\textsuperscript{113} The remaining participant commented that they did not know which class they were.
polyamorous/non-monogamous. Five participants were in legally recognised relationships (3 marriages, 2 civil partnerships) and another 7 were cohabiting. The remainder of the relationships were described as ‘casual’ or ‘new’ (5), long-term (2), or serious but living apart (one).

Participants were asked what involvement they had with LGBT and/or bisexual communities. Multiple responses were given, and ranged from involvement with bisexual specific events and communities such as BiCon and BiFest (5), to wider LGBT communities such as groups that people were involved with through work or social life (8), and the wider lesbian and gay ‘scene’ (3). Some mentioned that they considered their friends as their community (4), while some women reported no association with any communities (4).

Finally, the women were asked to list 5 words to describe their political, cultural or religious affiliations. The most common answers given were left-wing (8), atheist/non-religious (7), liberal (6), and feminist (5). Other words used by one or two participants included apolitical, bi, broad-minded, Catholic, Christian, ecologist, environmentalist, kinky, Pagan, Quaker, queer, spiritual, and vegetarian. A summary of the key information from the demographic information is shown in Appendix 11.

**Transcription and analysis**

Analysis was considered an ongoing process beginning during the interviews, when particular aspects of the women’s talk were more striking to me than others. After later interviews my Director of Studies recommended that I began making field notes. I did so, and these went beyond the reflections which I referred to above, because they were more detailed accounts of how the interviews went. These also informed my analysis, but are considered too personal (for both me and my participants) to include in my thesis.

**Transcription**

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114 One woman identified as polyamorous but was only with one partner at the time of the interview. During the interviews another 4 participants also discussed that their relationships had previously been non-monogamous/polyamorous, or that they hoped they would become so in the future.
Transcription involved listening and re-listening\textsuperscript{115} to the women’s accounts in order to best capture their talk (Bird, 2005). This was done to a detailed level, in order to be as accurate as possible. I attempted to capture and bring to life the women’s talk by noting major paralinguistic features (see Appendix 1). However, when data extracts were used in Chapters Six, Seven and Nine, quotations were edited, and finer details (such as repeated words, or stumbled over words) were removed in order to ensure readability.

Interviews were transcribed verbatim, and I reflected on the interviews during transcription. I reevaluated the questions and how I had asked them, and considered the flow of the interviews. The transcription process allowed me to stand back from my own position as interviewer and become an observer of the interviews (Bird, 2005). In this sense transcription allowed me to separate myself somewhat (albeit temporarily) from my insider perspective (discussed in Chapter Four). Transcription was considered part of data analysis (Lapadat & Lindsay, 1999), and interviews were ‘actively’ listened to in order to consider patterns of talk that were becoming apparent. Approaching transcription in this way allowed me to immerse myself in the data to occur early in the analysis (Lapadat & Lindsay, 1999; Bird, 2005).

**Thematic Analysis**

Boyatzis (1998), Attride-Stirling (2001), and Braun and Clarke (2006), advise researchers to ensure that they elaborate on ‘what they are doing and why, and to include the often-omitted ‘how’ they did their analysis’ (Braun & Clarke, 2006:79). This is valuable to researchers in order to ‘enhance the value of their (own) interpretations, as well as aid other researchers wishing to carry out similar projects’ (Attride-Stirling 2001:386, see also Braun & Clarke, 2006). Hayes (2000) provided a seven stage guide to the process of thematic analysis, and the procedures undertaken here were based a combination of these, and Braun & Clarke’s (2006) recent guidelines (which had

\textsuperscript{115}Two of the later interviews were transcribed (in order to save time) by a professional transcription service. However, these were then listened to, checked and edited in order to amend errors and include finer detail than provided.
specifically intended to fill the gap in provision of clear guidelines on the use of thematic analysis\textsuperscript{116}.

I addressed the pertinent questions that Braun & Clarke (2006) posed for researchers to consider before analysis. The first relates to how much data is required to constitute a theme. In order to be as exploratory as possible, if the \textit{quantity} of data to support a theme was minimal, as long as the \textit{quality} was rich (or particularly striking) then it was included. The next considerations were whether analysis would aim to provide a 'rich description of the data set, or a detailed account of one particular aspect' (p83), whether to use inductive or deductive analysis, and semantic or latent themes.

It is generally considered that there are two distinctive forms of thematic analysis. In deductive analysis themes are developed based on existing theory and research. (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In contrast, themes in inductive thematic analysis are generated \textit{directly} from the data\textsuperscript{117} (Boyatzis 1998, Braun & Clarke, 2006). The result is that in deductive analysis the researcher imposes restraints on the data, whereas an inductive approach increases the scope and possibilities of what analysis will discover from the data (Clarke & Turner, 2007). An inductive approach has been advocated as appropriate when there is little pre-existing theory to draw upon (Hayes, 2000), as was the case here.

While inductive analysis was my choice due to the exploratory aims of the interviews, it is important to acknowledge that 'researchers cannot free themselves of their theoretical and epistemological commitments, and data are not coded in an epistemological vacuum' (Braun & Clarke, 2006: 84). It is this dilemma which has led to the question of when researchers should read the literature around their topic. Although knowing anything about the topic may narrow the vision of data analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), the process of my PhD required research proposals and ethics applications, which included literature reviews. The development of the interview schedule also necessitated reading previous literature on the topic. Further it is inevitable that ideas generated by participants influence subsequent interviews. This is

\textsuperscript{116}Many recent papers cite this paper in their methods section (e.g., Farvid & Braun, 2006; Frith, Harcourt & Fuscell, 2007; Harcourt & Frith, 2007) which provides support for the credibility and clarity of their structured outline.

\textsuperscript{117}Some researchers have used a hybrid technique that incorporates both inductive and deductive approaches (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006).
not necessarily problematic, and there is not a 'solution' to a researcher’s pre-existing knowledge. However, I do recognise that I did not approach analysis as a 'blank slate'.

I chose not to analyse the data with the intention of generating latent themes, because these require a level of theoretical interpretation (Braun & Clarke, 2006), which I felt would move away from how these women understood their bisexual identity. Therefore, I chose to stay close to the data, and present semantic themes:

'With a semantic approach, the themes are identified within the explicit or surface meanings of the data, and the analyst is not looking for anything beyond what a participant has said or what has been written. Ideally, the analytic process involves a progression from description [...] to interpretation, where there is an attempt to theorize the significance of the patterns and their broader meanings and implications (Braun & Clarke, 2006:84).

In identifying semantic themes, I was able to stay focused on representing the women's experiences, and gaining a deeper and more nuanced understanding of their perspectives. Finally, Braun and Clarke (2006) advise researchers to consider (and make clear) their epistemology. My choices of data analysis were informed by, and fitted well with, the feminist constructionist LGBTQ framework from which I was working. I considered these choices the best way to access the breadth and depth of bisexual women’s understandings of sexuality and visual identity.

I end the section with a description of procedure I undertook. I familiarised myself with my data (Braun & Clarke, 2006), during the interviews, through reflection, field notes and transcription. Once interviews were transcribed they were read, then re-read and notes were made in the margins (Hayes, 2000; Braun & Clarke, 2006) and wider ideas jotted in a notepad. I engaged with aiming to ensure that all the data was read with similar attentiveness (Braun & Clarke, 2006) and the data was coded line by line (e.g., every line of data was coded). At this point I began to generate data codes (or as Hayes, 2000, terms them, proto or pre-themes e.g., frequent reoccurrences across and within the interviews) in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I also found it useful to draw on Joffe and Yardley’s (2004) description of codes as ‘taking chunks of text and labelling them as falling into certain categories, in a way that allows for later retrieval and analysis of the data’ (p59).
In the early stages of interview data analysis Microsoft Word was used to make comments, and data was copied and pasted into other Word documents which related to particular codes. It was decided that quotations from interviews could be used in more than one code or theme (Clarke & Braun, 2006), because it was often difficult to locate excerpts into only one code. Themes were based on similar groups of codes, and a number of maps and visual aids (e.g., mind maps, highlighting, cutting up of lists of quotations and/or codes to reorganise etc.) were also used to help organise the codes into themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The process was an iterative one that moved backwards and forwards between the data and the analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This was particularly the case because the first dozen interviews were preliminarily analysed and provided the foundations for presentations at two conferences (Appearance Matters 3, BPS Psychology of Women Section (POWS) Conference). Further, bisexual women proved to be a hidden and hard to engage population, which meant that responses to calls for participants were slow at times. Therefore, data collection and analysis sometimes ran in parallel. This also meant that data transcripts and early analysis were returned to after a period of time and re-read and re-coded at a later stage.

When the final analysis took place, themes were developed. I tried to keep themes both distinct, yet interlinked in order to provide a rich story that mapped the overall data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This resulted in a great deal of changes in subthemes, themes, and maps in order to find the best way in which to ‘tell the story’. Due to the vast quantity of quotes, codes and themes, some were discarded during the final stages. The most illustrative, striking, reoccurring and interesting were retained (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis process continued during the writing of my research report and I constantly shifted between original transcripts, (and editing of) codes, subthemes, themes and thematic maps (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Themes gradually became named (Hayes, 2000; Braun & Clarke, 2006) and as data analysis took place theme names changed, although some of the ‘working titles’ remained in the final report. The main themes are reported in Chapters Six and Seven.
Bisexual women’s understandings of their sexuality

This chapter reports the first two themes from the interview data. The focus of the interview schedule was appearance, but the women often led the discussion towards talking more broadly about bisexual identity. It was predicted that participants might talk about their experiences of bisexual identity, and that these discussions would be likely to relate to biphobia. However, the depth and detail of their discussion around this topic, how important it was to them, and the strength of their desire to talk about it was unanticipated, particularly because it did not directly relate to the research questions that the schedule was based on. Part of the aim of a feminist epistemology is to ‘give voice’ to participants (see, Chapters One and Four), and so it was imperative that I altered the interview schedule in order to find out more about the women’s lived experiences of bisexual identity and biphobia. What was abundantly clear in these interviews was that these women felt that bisexuality was a stigmatised identity.

The theme (Mis)fits, (Mis)understandings, and (Mis)representations, illustrates the ways in which the women felt that bisexuality is severely misunderstood. In the second theme, “It is this kind of unicorn identity”: Fixidity, Fluidity and Freedom, I report the different ways in which the women understood their own identity, and how some believed that bisexuality holds the potential to break down rigid and binary identity categories. These themes may not initially appear to directly relate to appearance, but in actuality they are critical in understanding how the women made sense of their appearance and visual identity (reported in Chapter Seven). They are also important in demonstrating that through other people’s understandings of their sexuality, these bisexual women felt marginalised and stigmatised, and believed that bisexuality lacked recognition or visibility.

This chapter makes a unique contribution to the literature on bisexuality in being one of the first qualitative studies to investigate bisexual women’s accounts of how they, and others, conceptualise bisexual identity, and to explore bisexual women’s experiences of biphobia and how they negotiate their identity in relation to widespread negative conceptualisations of bisexuality. This chapter makes an important empirical contribution to the existing (largely) theoretical and conceptual discussions about negative conceptualisations of bisexuality (see Chapter Three), and on the literature on biphobia. The women’s accounts also relate to existing literature on bisexual identity (e.g., Kinsey, Pomeroy & Martin, 1948; Kinsey, Pomeroy, Martin &

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Gebhard, 1953; Klein, 1978/1980; Murphy, 1997; Esterberg, 2002; Diamond, 2003; 2005a; 2005b; Gammon & Isgro, 2006; Bowes-Catton, 2007; Barker, Richards & Bowes-Catton, 2009) and on polyamorous and multiple relationships (e.g., Klesse, 2005; 2006; Noël, 2006; Sheff, 2006; Ritchie & Barker, 2005; 2006; Barker & Ritchie, 2007).

Review of the literature on biphobia

Biphobia has been defined as prejudice against, dislike of, or negative ‘attitudes’ toward bisexuality and bisexual people (Bennett, 1992; Eliason, 1997; Mulick & Wright, 2002; Weiss, 2004). Compared to a rather sizable literature on homophobia (e.g., Herek, 1984; 1986; 1989; 1998; Herek & Glunt, 1993; Herek & Capitanio, 1996; DiPlacido, 1998; Hegarty, 2006; 2010; Ahmad & Bhugra, 2010; Walch, Orlosky, Sinkkanen & Stevens, 2010), there is very little psychological research specifically focused on biphobia. That which exists is mainly U.S. conducted research, which has investigated other (non-bisexual) people’s attitudes towards bisexuality. Far less research has focused on bisexual people and their beliefs about biphobia.

U.S. health psychologist Michele Eliason (1997) asked 229 heterosexual undergraduate (170 women, 59 men) psychology students, aged between 18 and 34, to fill out a number of questionnaires. Her main findings were that 50% of participants ‘rated bisexual women as acceptable’, while the other 50% ‘rated them as unacceptable’ (Eliason, 1997:324). When asked if they would have a relationship with a bisexual person, a total of 77% considered it either unlikely or very unlikely. Most participants had no bisexual friends or acquaintances (hence are less likely to have any understanding of bisexuality). She also noted that many participants made use of the ‘don’t know’ option when answering the questions, which suggests that they lack any understanding of bisexuality. In her conclusion, Eliason (1997) highlighted that a lack of accurate information about sexuality could be one explanation of the relatively high levels of biphobia in her sample.

U.S. counselling psychologists Jonathan Mohr and Aaron Rochlen’s (1999) literature review found that bisexual people may face hostility and social marginalisation from

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118 I acknowledge that the notion of ‘attitudes’ is located within essentialist and quantitative psychology. Some social constructionist scholars have been critical of the assumption that individuals have stable ‘internal constructs’ which are called ‘attitudes’, or that they can be measured scientifically (Speer & Potter, 2000; Hegarty & Massey, 2007).
homosexual and heterosexual people. The authors developed a scale to measure attitudes towards bisexuality. In doing so, they conducted a series of studies in which they asked lesbian, gay and heterosexual students at U.S. universities to complete scales about their attitudes towards bisexual people. Overall, they found that although bisexuality was generally viewed positively, lesbian and gay, and heterosexual participants made statements which demonstrated a lack of understanding of bisexual identity. Participants also believed bisexuals to be incapable of monogamous relationships, or questioned how genuine bisexual identity was (Mohr & Rochlen, 1999).

Psychologist Gregory Herek (2002) conducted telephone questionnaires with heterosexual U.S. citizens from a number of U.S. states, with the aim of investigating heterosexual people’s attitudes towards bisexual men and women. Participants had a mean age of 47, and most had a college level education. The only group of people evaluated more negatively than bisexual people were drug users. The author concluded that it is possible that these negative beliefs result from stereotypes about bisexuals (Herek, 2002). U.S. psychologists Patrick Mulick and Lester Wright’s (2002) aims were to demonstrate that biphobia existed, to show that it was present in heterosexual and lesbian and gay communities, and to develop a scale to measure biphobia. In order to test their scale, a number of studies were conducted with convenience samples of university students, including some who were recruited through the university’s LGB organisation. Mulick and Wright concluded that biphobia existed in both heterosexual and homosexual communities, and that this can result in difficult environments for bisexual people.

Other psychologists have also theorised about the impact of biphobia on bisexual people and communities. In her discussion of therapy with bisexual people, U.S. counselling psychologist Sari Dworkin (2001) discusses how biphobia may lead to violence against bisexuals. U.S. psychologist M. Paz Galupo (2006) reviewed literature on bisexual women’s friendship. She concluded that biphobia may play a part in the development of, and continually influence the dynamics of, bisexual women’s friendships, particularly with heterosexual women.

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119 There were a number of groups: e.g., religious groups, homosexual people, those who inject illegal drugs, people with AIDS, racial and ethnic groups, abortion opponents, and advocates, and bisexual people (see Herek, 2002:67).
U.S. health researchers Lori Ross, Cheryl Dobinson, and Allison Eady (2010) conducted focus groups and telephone interviews with a convenience sample of fifty-five bisexual participants. Participants were asked two questions about the experiences and challenges of being bisexual, and two questions about what they felt had a positive or negative impact on ‘your mental health and emotional wellbeing as a bisexual person’ (Ross et al., 2010:497). Participants raised many of the negative stereotypes described in Chapter Three. Some made specific reference to how they were frustrated by being labelled as lesbian or heterosexual based on their current partner, and that they felt invisible as bisexual people. Some participants described instances of biphobia at lesbian and gay events, while others felt that they had positive experiences of LGBT community. Some participants were monogamous, but those that were not discussed the challenges, and the value, of polyamorous relationships. The authors tentatively concluded that there could be links between the discrimination experienced by bisexual people and their mental health, but highlight the importance of not pathologising bisexual people’s mental wellbeing (Ross et al., 2010).

To my knowledge, there is only Ross et al.’s (2010) study, and two others, that have actually asked bisexual people about their experiences of biphobia. In French research by Daniel Welzer-Lang (2008), the author conducted a qualitative survey with (mainly\textsuperscript{120}) lesbian and gay participants at a homosexualities summer school. The aim was to understand more about biphobia, and the author comments on the invisibility of bisexual people within lesbian and gay space. Some of the participant’s replies are reported, arranged in categories from ‘most biphobic’ to ‘most bipositive’ (p.83), for example, this response from the most biphobic category:

‘One response to the question “What would you say about bisexuals?” was:

“They’re hypocritical, unfaithful, two-faced, upright, cold, pains in the neck, turncoats, self-important, trendy, heterosexual, capricious, and frigid.” When asked “What can they be blamed for?” he answered: “They always say no, and when they say yes, it’s always short-lived; when they say yes for a long time, they’re certainly cheating on you.” [...] and he concluded: “They don’t exist.”’ (Welzer-Lang, 2008: 84).

Although the findings were mixed, overall 45% of the sample were ‘critical of bisexuality and/or bisexuals’ (Welzer-Lang, 2008:88).

\textsuperscript{120} The sample included a small number of bisexual participants.
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Finally, in an interview study by Australian psychologist Kirsten McLean (2008b), a purposive sample of 60 bisexual participants (20 men and 40 women), were asked about identity, relationships, and community. Many of the participants felt that their bisexuality was problematic within lesbian and gay space due to anti-bisexual attitudes, and feared being ostracised. McLean (2008b) concluded that some bisexual people may avoid LGB communities, precisely because they fear exclusion or discrimination. Those who did attend LGB spaces often 'blended in' (i.e., did not necessarily 'come out'), and McLean concluded that bisexual people's relationship with LGBT communities is a complex one.

In summary, a very small body of research (none of which has been conducted in the U.K.) indicates that lesbians and gay men, and heterosexual people\textsuperscript{121}, are likely to feel negatively about bisexuality and bisexual people, and that this is likely to have an impact on bisexual people's social wellbeing.

It is clear from this literature review that many beliefs about bisexuality are based on the negative conceptualisations described in Chapter Three. For example, bisexual people were believed to be sex obsessed, non-monogamous, and therefore untrustworthy, (e.g., Eliason, 1997; Mohr & Rochen, 1999; Herak, 2002; McLean, 2008b; Ross et al., 2010). They were also considered to be carriers of disease (Eliason, 1997), who were unlikely to come out (e.g., could be viewed as too cowardly) (Eliason, 1997; McLean, 2008b; Ross et al., 2010), or likely to be performing bisexuality purely for the pleasure of heterosexual men (Ross et al., 2010). It has been proposed that biphobia stems from its challenge to the 'rigid hetero/homo distinction' (Fish, 2006:76), and a common finding in these studies was dismissal of the legitimacy of bisexual identity, and/or bisexuality being considered to be a passing phase (e.g., Eliason, 1997; Mohr & Rochen, 1999; McLean, 2008b; Ross et al., 2010).

\textsuperscript{121}This has sometimes been termed 'double discrimination' (Ochs, 1996; Mulick & Wright, 2002; Barker & Yockney, 2004).
1. (Mis)Fits, (Mis)Understandings, and (Mis)representations

(Mis)fits: “There’s nowhere to fit”

This subtheme explores the way in which the women believed that bisexual people were misfits because they are not understood by, and therefore did not fit into, either an LGBT or a heterosexual world. The inclusion of the ‘B’ (and the ‘T’) implies that bisexual (and trans) people are welcome and included within a broad LGBT category (Clarke & Rüdolfsdóttir, 2005; Clarke & Peel, 2007b). Scholars have previously highlighted the necessity for caution when using terms such as LGBT/ LGBTQ, due to a lack of convincing evidence to show any existence of the coherence and inclusivity that the terms suggests (Clarke & Rüdolfsdóttir, 2005; Clarke & Peel, 2007a; 2007b). These interviews show the women challenging the notion of a singular, coherent, cohesive, or inclusive LGBT community.  

“We’re kind of lumped together aren’t we, this LGBT jobby (mm). But ... the LGs aren’t very happy with the Bs (mm) ... so we’re kind of stuffed in a community that doesn’t actually understand us either, you know, okay the heterosexuals don’t understand us but nor, neither do the lesbians (mm) and the gays’ (P8, Roxy).

Roxy’s narrative echoes the findings of previous research, where bisexual people have felt that they are “interlopers” within the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered community (Gurevich, Bower, Mathieson & Dhayanandhan, 2007:217; also see, Weiss, 2004; Mclean, 2008a). Later, Roxy acknowledged that she could ‘sort of see that maybe ten or twenty years ago (mm) when people came out, they would have needed to be protected (mm mm), so they would have needed the security of ... LGBT’ (P8, Roxy). While Roxy ‘sort of sees’ that LGBT community has served important functions in supporting and protecting non-heterosexual people (e.g., Lehavot, Balsam & Ibrahim-Wells, 2009, also see Chapter Two), she seemed unconvinced that for bisexual people to separate themselves from mainstream heterosexual society, and be ‘stuffed’ into a separate LGBT community, was necessarily an advisable political

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122 The data was transcribed verbatim. However, for ease of reading, repeated words, stumbled over words, and ‘emrs’ have been removed from the extracts used here, unless their hesitance becomes relevant to the analysis. My talk is shown in brackets, unless listed separately with my name preceding it. The [...] indicates removed data, and words within parentheses indicate clarification, or removal of identifying information which has been changed for anonymity.
123 The transcriptions can be seen in Appendix 1.
strategy. Instead, she thought it important for bisexual people to be able to be visible and exist within heterosexual space too. She said ‘now I worry that [...] if we’re not out there being normal we’re not forcing [heterosexual] society to accept us as normal’ (P8, Roxy), implying that bisexuality is not currently considered to be ‘normal’.

Roxy’s talk also evidenced that she liked feeling included. She enjoyed being part of a particular group (which was unrelated to sexuality) and described how she liked it precisely ‘because it’s inclusive and it includes everybody (mm). And I think sometimes the kind of, queer culture, [...] but particularly the lesbian culture is not inclusive’ (P8, Roxy). Roxy distinguished between LGBT, ‘queer’ and lesbian culture which demonstrates the over-simplicity of the term LGBT, and its underlying implication of a single cohesive community (Clarke & Peel, 2007a; 2007b). Betty’s talk echoed Roxy’s in identifying multiple communities:

‘I’m a bit wary of the term “community” [...] I think there’s a lot of talk about LGBT community (yeah) and I just don’t think it exists, (mm). Well, I certainly don’t feel a part of it (mm). I s’pose I do a little bit, I’m involved with LGBT work, and various communities through my work (mm), and there are various things, I mean the stuff like the LGBT Forum [...] With the lesbian sort of groups (mm) I’d feel quite reluctant to go to something like that because I don’t really identify as being a lesbian (mm) that’s not who I am [...] [but] lumping together sort of LGBT [...] there are different issues for lesbians and gay people and bisexual people, and massively different issues for trans people’ (P2, Betty).

These bisexual women believed that they were only ‘lumped in’ to LGBT space, and expressed beliefs that various LGBT spaces were policed (e.g., Eves, 2004; Taylor, 2007; 2008), and not unequivocally welcoming of bisexual people (Gurevich, et al., 2007; McLean, 2008a; 2008b). Lesbian space is clearly separate from LGBT space and even the term itself evidences clear boundaries which exclude bisexual women. Adele’s story strikingly told of how she felt unsupported by lesbian (and gay) spaces and by LGBT support groups. After she decided that she was bisexual, she called a lesbian and gay switchboard.\footnote{There are many lesbian and gay/LGBT switchboards around the U.K., which aim to offer support and information through their telephone services. While only some specifically include bisexuality in their name, (for example, Brighton and Hove LGBT Switchboard; http://www.switchboard.org.uk) others do not. Despite this, many state on their websites that}
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‘It was sort of like “well I’ve heard of bisexuality and I think there might be some resources for you in Scotland, and so you’d have a good chance if you go up there”. And that was it. It was just a person sounding really awkward on the phone. They didn’t want to talk to me [...] So then I felt really bad [...] I just thought “oh well I must be wrong”. And then for a bit of time I thought “maybe I am a lesbian”’ (P18, Adele).

In Chapter Three the negative stereotype of bisexual people as confused about their sexuality (e.g., Klein, 1978/1993; Zink, 1985; McLean, 2008b) was discussed. But, for Adele, confusion about her sexuality only arose after she sought support from a lesbian and gay switchboard, indicating that it is those who do not identify as bisexual who feel uncertainty about bisexual identity. The effect is that bisexual women feel invalidated. Adele concluded that the switchboard staff member was ‘completely biphobic’ and described how she felt after she called them:

‘I just felt like really awful about it. So I was like happy for one moment when I realised that “oh that’s what I am” (yeah) and then, you know, for the next, grief, about ten years honestly (mm) it was just absolute disaster’ (P18, Adele).

She found their suggestion of resources in Scotland rather ‘bizarre’, and searched locally for support groups. She attended a lesbian group, and her narrative poignantly exemplifies how when bisexual women ‘cross the boundaries’ they are made to feel unwelcome, which has wider psychological and emotional implications:

‘I thought maybe that will be different and maybe they might be able to help me and understand. It was just... that was just really, like a disaster movie (mm), being told to not come back [...] it was just a lot of rejection at that time [...] I just went to the first meeting (yeah) and was told if there are any bisexuals in the room, we want you to leave now. And I was too embarrassed to stand up and go out. So I had to like, wait till the end and then sort of escape and, yeah, it was just really unpleasant’ (P18, Adele).

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they aim to support all LGBT people, even when the B and the T are omitted from their title (e.g., Bristol Lesbian and Gay Switchboard; http://bristolblags.org.uk/, London Lesbian and Gay Switchboard; http://www.llgs.org.uk, Nottingham and Nottinghamshire Lesbian and Gay Switchboard; http://www.nottsllgs.btik.com/, and Strathclyde Lesbian and Gay Switchboard http://www.sgls.co.uk/).
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The term LGBT could be argued to at least be a step towards inclusivity (although this currently remains a somewhat empty inclusivity). However, exclusively lesbian space which does not even attempt to include bisexual people was evidenced in the women’s talk.

Much of the women’s talk portrayed their understanding that bisexual people were misfits not only in LGBT and lesbian space but also within the (commercialised) space of ‘the scene’ (e.g., McLean, 2008b). Interestingly, Elizabeth described the scene (arguably an’ LGBT space) specifically as ‘the gay scene’. The term ‘gay’ can include (gay) men and (gay) women, but such terminology excludes bisexual people, as does ‘the gay scene’ itself:

‘[M]ost of ... the gays know who the bisexual people are and ... if they didn’t like that, y’know in terms of ... “you’re being greedy” or” you haven’t picked” or, whatever, then they’ll know and they’ll stay away [...] you see them in the corner, it’s like, yeah, that person, yeah ... (P5, Berni).

‘I’ve always been out about being gay, but to be bisexual, it’s like an excuse isn’t it, it’s like you’re not really gay, you haven’t got the guts to say your gay, so you’ll say you’re bisexual (mm). And then I’m sure, it’s all the gay scene say, they think you’re saying you’re bisexual just so you can fit in with them, but you’re not really (right). So it’s a real kind of, there’s nowhere to fit (yep ... yep). And I sometimes think I have to explain and say “well you know, I was gay for years” and y’know (laughter) I do feel I have to do that ... to kind of be accepted’ (P7, Elizabeth).

In Elizabeth’s extract, the only possibilities presented are that bisexual women are too cowardly to admit that they are gay (e.g., Petford, 2004; Diamond, 2008; McLean, 2008a; 2008b), or are trying to ‘fit in’ on the scene. These understandings of bisexuality perpetuate notions that bisexuality does not really exist as a valid identity position (e.g., Barker & Langridge, 2008; McLean, 2008b), and clearly demonstrate that the negative conceptualisations (described in Chapter Three) are still abundant on the gay scene. Berni believed that the reason that lesbians on ‘the scene’ shun bisexual people is because of their association with men:

‘I know two people who are out as gay (yep) but over the course of the last year or so, [they] have been involved with men or expressed an interest in men and
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quite a few of their gay friends have then shunned them (yep) which I think is quite awful’ (P5, Berni).

What bisexual women have in common with lesbians is their capacity to be attracted to members of the ‘same sex’ (e.g., women). However, when their attraction to the ‘opposite’ sex (e.g., men) is acknowledged, this commonality appears to disappear. Men are perceived of as threatening to lesbian space (e.g., Bright, 1992; Petford, 2003), therefore when a bisexual woman enters LGBT or lesbian space, her attraction to men is the potential ‘elephant in the room’. This mirrors previous literature which has suggested that bisexual people feel hostility from lesbians, or that they are not welcome in lesbian space (e.g., Rust, 1995; Hartman, 2005).

Blue stood out in that she had managed to find a community who accepted her bisexuality, but her relationship with a man was disruptive:

‘[T]hey say they are bi inclusive, but it’s a women’s group (mm) okay, so what that actually means is that all the women who have women partners, when they go on the hiking on a Sunday morning, can take their women partners, but I can’t take [husband] […] I could take my kids (mm) with their father as a kind of shadow figure (mm). […] And the way that they get away with that is going “but it’s a women’s group”. (Right). And it’s like yeah, but if you’re bi inclusive, y’know, bi people have bloody male partners, (mm) so what you have to do then is say “well you can’t have your partner here either” […] “so those are the issues you’re dealing with, when you say you’re bi inclusive”’ (P20, Blue).

Other participants also discussed how their relationships with men threatened feelings of belonging on ‘the scene’, regardless of whether the women disclosed the existence of a male partner. Claire used to ‘go out on the scene a lot’, but said:

‘I always felt a bit like (takes a breath) inhibited about the fact that I was with a man. I mean I wouldn’t go out with him, but, y’know, the fact that (mm) he was at home, and that people that were around sort of knew that (mm). I always felt, I always felt like … I had to sort of justify my existence, I had to justify being there’ (P14, Claire).

Emily had similarly disconcerting experiences of ‘the scene’: 
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‘I think it’s difficult for bisexual women to fit in for the most part. I think, if you’re going to go out on the scene (5 second pause) I don’t know, I found it quite a closed society ... and ... quite a lot of, y’know, “don’t mention that you’re bisexual”. [...] I don’t think the best ploy is to go out and say “oh yeah I’m bisexual” [...] you always feel a bit like you’re deceiving in a way (mm) not that I, tried to pretend that I was a lesbian when I went out, [but] I wouldn’t go round broadcasting “oh yeah I’ve got a boyfriend at home by the way” in case they like, run you out of the pub’ (P3, Emily).

Emily raises the issue of ‘coming out’, and Adele discussed her distaste with the notion of hiding her bisexuality when she told me of a friend who reacted negatively to her ‘coming out’: ‘[S]he just completely freaked out on me [...] And she said “you can’t tell anybody, they can’t find out about this”. And it was all, you know. I’ve had my time with grubby little secrets’ (P18, Adele). These women either felt the need, or were advised, to keep their sexuality hidden in order to fit in. However, in their talk there was evidence of their belief in a ‘coming out imperative’, where they conceived of ‘coming out’ as a positive and ideal position (Rasmussen, 2004; McLean, 2007). However, ‘coming out’ was an act of negotiation which could be complex and problematic for these bisexual women, due to the risk of being rejected if they did so, which links to the abundance of negative stereotypes which exist within some shared spaces (McLean, 2007).

The women spoke more about not fitting into LGBT spaces, and less about not fitting into heterosexual space, and their talk may make them appear to be ‘anti-lesbian’. However, many of them had a lesbian partner, socialised with lesbian friends, or in some cases had previously identified as lesbians themselves. It is possible that their inclusion (albeit somewhat theoretical) within the broader category of ‘LGBT’ meant that these women felt entitled to speak in a way that heterosexual women may not have done. This suggests that the boundaries between lesbian and bisexual women are somewhat blurred. Further, the interview schedule included questions about lesbian dress, which directly drew lesbian sexuality into the discussion, but contained less explicit mention of heterosexual dress. Further, it is possible that they did not expect their same-sex attraction to be understood by heterosexual people for whom ‘opposite-sex’ attraction is the norm, but that they turned specifically to LGBT/lesbian space with an expectation of finding a place to belong, where they will be welcomed.
and understood (Fish, 2006). Accordingly, when they do not receive the ‘support and solidarity’ (Fish, 2006:75) they had hoped for, this may be unexpected (and upsetting).

However, there was some reference to feeling a misfit in both LGBT/lesbian and heterosexual space. Roxy had mentioned earlier that ‘the heterosexuals don’t understand us’ and later said ‘it’s just really difficult, cos you don’t fit anywhere’ (P8, Roxy). Claire stated:

‘[Y]ou’re never at home, so when you’re in gay space you feel out of place, and when you’re in straight space you feel out of place and, y’know, and just in terms of keeping your psyche together and, and being able to preserve a coherent sense of self which I think is just, like really important to people [...] it’s just constantly discombobulating and estranging and then makes you feel funny and, odd’ (P14, Claire).

Claire felt that her wider sense of identity was at risk of disappearing. Roxy and Claire’s narratives of how they felt misunderstood by both LGB and heterosexual people, and in LGBT/lesbian and heterosexual space, echoes previous research (e.g., Ochs, 1996; Mullick & Wright, 2002).

(Mis)understanding: “well I think you should just make your mind up”

The women not only felt like they were misfits, but also believed that bisexuality was misunderstood, often in ways that mirrored the literature in Chapter Three. Some of the women made references to other’s perception of their bisexual identity as only temporary. Both Alex and Rose had felt pressure to ‘get off the fence’ (e.g., Berenson, 2002; Bower, Gurevich & Mathieson, 2002; Esterberg, 2002), and identify as either lesbian or heterosexual from the (lesbian, feminist) women’s movements (see Hartman, 2005; Clarke & Peel, 2007b), in which they were involved over thirty years ago. These quotations provide another example of bisexual women being understood as ‘traitors’ to lesbians, due to their association with men, and as ‘fence sitters’:

‘It was really difficult, because there was a lot of pressure to be either one thing or the other [...] lesbian women wanted bisexual women to come off the fence (mm) and identify with their camp (mm). Even just as a political act, there was a lot of talk about that (mm), and I just couldn’t do that (laughs) (mm). It seemed wrong’ (P11, Rose).
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Alex drew attention to the resentment she felt as a result of this pressure, which she linked to being more assertive about her bisexuality in recent years:

‘I felt very pressured for years and years and years to identify as lesbian [...] I met women through a sort of lesbian feminist world. And I felt under huge pressure to suppress my bisexuality [...] to the extent where I feel quite hurt actually and quite bitter [...] [Now] I’m aware of sort of asserting my bisexuality sometimes almost quite forcefully because I think there was a almost mind control a bit [...] If you’re going to identify as lesbian then that’s for the cause and Greenham Common and, and everything and (mm) if you still fancy men, or you’re sleeping with men or you’ve got friends who are men, y’know, then you’re not with us, y’know “choose now!!”‘ (P9, Alex).

However, other women spoke of recently sensing pressures to ‘get off the fence’, thus these understandings cannot be relegated to the past. Amy said ‘I belong to the LGBT (mm) group and I’ve had some snide remarks, about that (mm) about sitting on the fence (mm) y’know, which way are you going’ (P12, Amy). Sandy felt that there was ‘a degree of ... I wouldn’t say animosity but ... kind of like, make your minds up kind of thing’ (P10, Sandy). The women’s experiences mirrored previous research, where bisexual people were was understood by others to be ‘fencesitting’ (e.g., Berenson, 2002; Bower et al., 2002, Gurevich & Mathieson, 2002), between what are seemingly the only two ‘valid’ sexual identities of heterosexual and gay, or to be passing through a phase from which they will eventually emerge once they have ‘made up their minds’ (e.g., Ault, 1996; Petford, 2004; McLean, 2008b). Until the bisexual person ‘decides’ they are in a precarious position, balanced on the fence between heterosexual and lesbian. Consequently, as has been found in previous research on beliefs about bisexuality with heterosexual and lesbian and gay participants, bisexuality is not understood as a legitimate identity (e.g., Eliason, 1997; Mohr & Rochen, 1999).

The notion of fence sitting ties in with discourses of greedy bisexuals, who want to ‘have their cake and eat it’ (e.g., Spalding & Peplau, 1997), through having the pleasure of same-sex encounters, and membership within lesbian and gay communities, while still maintaining their heterosexual privilege and avoiding the stigma of being ‘out’ (e.g., Zinik, 1985; Rust, 1995; Garber, 1995/2000; Hemmings, 2002). Emily’s ex-girlfriend used to say ‘quite harsh things to me almost like trying to provoke me, she used to say y’know, like, “you bisexuals, you sit on the fence and you
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choose from the whole bloody world” (P3, Emily). Lucy had been directly confronted at a Pride event when a stranger learnt that she was bisexual:

[T]his woman just went “well I think you should just make your mind up” and just did this like really standard response to the bisexual problem, and she just totally laid into me, said “you should just make your mind up and so on and so on and so on” and I just said “well thanks for your understanding love” (P19, Lucy).

The women’s discussion of feeling under pressure to identify as ‘either one thing or the other’ demonstrates others’ understanding of sexuality as entirely dichotomous, which for some these women had led to verbal abuse from others. As identified in the literature, mononormative understandings of sexual identity reign supreme. As Marie said: ‘It’s like it’s not really believed in [...] people want women either to be straight or gay and they don’t want a kind of middle ground’ (P13, Marie). Here Alex tells of her sexuality being explicitly dismissed:

‘I’ve just been spending the last five years coming out to our lesbian friends as bi (right ok). And we went to the pub last Thursday with a lesbian friend of ours and I was saying about meeting you, and doing this research, and she just put her pint down and said “you’re not bi Alex, you’re a lesbian!”’. And Alyssa and I were saying afterwards it’s like, y’know, even to intelligent well-informed lesbian friends it’s like, can’t compute, “you’re with Alyssa, you’ve been with her for fourteen years (mm), you’re not bi” (laughs)’ (P9, Alex).

This led to her feeling that bisexual women would struggle to maintain their identity, regardless of the gender of their current partner. Here she talks of a bisexual friend who has been in a long term relationship with a man:

‘[W]e’ve had, the same struggles holding onto our bisexual identity [...] she has the complete mirror image opposite of me that y’know [...] over and over again, people make assumptions that she’s completely heterosexual (mm) because she’s married to this guy and I have the opposite experience of everybody just assumes that I’m gay’ (P9, Alex).

Due to binary (mis)understandings, these bisexual women believed that bisexuality is perceived to be a genuine sexual identity (e.g., Gurevich et al., 2007). This supports recent research in the U.S. and Australia, where bisexual participants reported that
their identity was not considered to be a legitimate one (McLean, 2008b; Ross et al., 2010).

The effect of the imaginary fence is also to position bisexuality as a temporary phase between the ‘straight and gay’. In turn this reiterates bisexual identity as inauthentic or temporary (e.g., Ault, 1996a; Diamond, 2008; McLean, 2008b), which can be disempowering for bisexual people (Entrup & Firestein, 2007). Matilda discussed the reaction of her family when she split up with her first girlfriend, saying ‘when I broke up with her, they assumed that that had just been a phase (right) and assumed that that was just a one-off like experimented and whatever and that was done’ (P17, Matilda). Blue thought that what other people assumed about bisexual identity was that:

‘You’re just confused, it’s a phase you’re going through (mm), it’s not fair to the gay world, being a traitor. Why should we be negated? […] And it suggests as well that there’s something not quite right about us (mm). That actually we don’t exist in our own right (mm). Y’know that we are passing through, we will eventually realise that actually we’re straight, or actually we’re gay (mm). Y’know, whereas actually, no, we’re not (mm). We’re not.’ (P20, Blue).

Blue defended bisexual women’s right to a sense of identity, distinct from either heterosexuality or lesbian identity. Her quotation shows her insight into ‘the problem’ of bisexuality, in that it challenges the binary model of only two fixed identity categories (e.g., Fish, 2006; Esterberg, 2002).

These quotations have shown how the women understood bisexuality to be (mis)understood through dichotomous and mononormative understandings. As a consequence, bisexuality was negated as a temporary or a non-existent sexuality. While bisexual people’s identity continues to be discredited, and unacknowledged, then bisexuality remains literally and conceptually invisible.

(Mis)representations: All aboard the bisexual bandwagon? Or “We don’t do it to order, and we don’t sell tickets”?

The bisexual women felt that bisexuality and bisexual women were (mis)represented in a number of ways. First, the women objected to, and disassociated from understandings of bisexuality as an attention seeking strategy to attract (and please) heterosexual men (e.g., Wilkinson, 1996a; Thompson, 2006; Diamond, 2005a; 2005b;
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Gurevich et al., 2007; Barker, Bowes-Catton, Iantaffi, Cassidy & Brewer, 2008; Fairyington, 2008), which are often encapsulated in the term ‘bicurious’.

Blue told me she had met women through placing an advert in a local newspaper. She had initially ‘put bicurious until I learnt that was not good’ (P20, Blue). When I asked her to elaborate, she stated that ‘there were so many women who were doing it because their blokes wanted them to […] to turn their bloke on, there was so much of that (mm) and bicurious seemed to reek of that’ (P20, Blue). Sarah shared her memory of teenage years in school:

‘slightly uglier females (laughs) that couldn’t get guys decided that they were all bisexual and just jumped on this bisexual bandwagon […] I really felt like it was to attract guys because it was, like, (yeah) “oh, look at me I’m willing to kiss a girl so therefore I’m more attractive” or something (yeah). And I think I just have issues with that label’ (P6, Sarah).

Roxy believed that a male friend flirted with her because he was curious about her bisexuality: ‘he’s a bit curious bless him (yep) it’s like “no we don’t do it to order and we don’t sell tickets … bog off”’(P8 Roxy). Roxy was aware of an understanding that bisexuality is for the consumption of men, evidenced in her suggestions that bisexuality can be understood as a consumable commodity. Roxy also felt that ‘bicurious’ was not something that she aligned with her own (‘genuine’) bisexual identity when she talked about representations of bisexuality on the social networking website ‘Facebook’, which her male ex-partner used to spend time on:

‘[T]here was like about a million people that were bicurious and actually, bicurious just means I wanna shag with a woman and a man really, it doesn’t mean (laugther) that you’re thinking that you might be bisexual and you wish to explore these feelings (mm), because you wouldn’t be doing that on a site, wearing nothing but your underwear’ (P8, Roxy).

She later made clear that the same ex-partner’s pornographic understandings had troubled her:

‘[He] was quite interested in the fact that I was bi from a sexual fantasy (mm) point of view (mm) which was quite odd (mm) […] He was very kind of curious and, it’s like, no I’m sorry, be I straight, gay, or in between, y’know I just don’t particularly want a threesome’ (P8, Roxy).
Roxy’s talk introduces an association between bisexuality and ideas of promiscuity or non-monogamy (Ault, 1996; McLean, 2008b). For Roxy, bisexuality cannot be simplified as people having sexual experiences with lots of people at the same time. Instead, for her, it is an identity which incorporates more than sex alone (e.g., Rust, 1992; Ault, 1996a; Esterberg, 2007). I asked Marie if she believed that bisexuality was very visible:

‘No, not at all, I think there’s a certain type of bisexuality that is visible and I don’t think that’s real bisexuality, I think that’s, porn films mainly and the fact that like women’ll, well, so many of my female friends do this, they’ll just like get off with each other just to like, in front of guys, to make guys like them’ (P13, Marie).

For Marie, there are ‘real’ and ‘fake’ bisexuals: ‘there’s so much of a focus on, a sort of faux bisexuality as being something to attract men (mm). The actual true sexuality is lost in that’ (P13, Marie). She also tied this in with representations from media sources: ‘I think the media, they just, they don’t really want to accept it or understand it’ which she believed stemmed from understandings of women’s sexuality ‘which is always in a kind of patriarchal society about men rather than about women’ (P13, Marie). Marie was disdainful of bicuriousity, and raised the term in relation to bi visibility:

‘I think all the sort of stereotypes, the pornographic stereotypes and the bicurious stereotype is very dismissive, it’s like it’s not a real sexuality, it’s not a real thing, it’s just you being indecisive [...] because bi, biness is so invisible in society (mm) unless you’re, like you’re bicurious, or you’re Katy Perry with that stupid Kissed a Girl song [...] that bloody Katy Perry song! (laughs) (P13, Marie).

Marie was scathing of the Katy Perry song, I Kissed a Girl (see Chapter Two). Although the song does not explicitly use the term bisexual, the lyrics tell the story of the female artist as curious about kissing a girl (‘I’m curious for you’). However, the lyrics also make clear that the singer’s exploration does not disrupt her relationship with a man (‘I kissed a girl just to try it, I hope my boyfriend don’t mind it’) and has only been for

125 Perhaps what these women inadvertently did was privilege a particular version of bisexuality as ‘real’, which in turn led to the dismissal of another ‘version’ of bisexuality, which may in fact be authentic for some.
fun (‘I don’t even know your name, it doesn’t matter, you’re my experimental game’). The song was understood (by these women at least) to be a portrayal of biciuriosity.

if the song is read as being about a bicurious/bisexual woman, then the depiction of her is as ‘really heterosexual’. This is reminiscent of ‘bisexuality a la mode’ (Wilkinson, 1996a), and ‘heteroflexibility’ (Diamond, 2005b), as outlined in Chapters Two and Three. The artist portrays a story that she has kissed a woman out of curiosity, and the implication is that far from her boyfriend objecting, he will in fact be titillated by her same-sex experimentation. Further, her exploration excludes any concern or respect for the woman who has been kissed. Berni strongly objected to this concept:

’Society again (mm hm) gives bisexual people a bad name (mm) in terms of, straight people messing about (mm, mm). And I think that’s where the root of the problem is with the whole “oh my God you’re bisexual” (mm), it’s like “oh right so you’re one of those people who messes about, and hurts people, and tramps on people” (mm) and yeah, and has no regard for anybody’s feelings, and it’s not that bisexual people are like that, it’s maybe straight people who are out for a laugh and don’t think about the consequences or y’know who don’t actually say “well I’m straight, I’m messing you about” (P5, Berni).

The women unanimously distanced themselves from I Kissed a Girl, the lyrics of which encapsulated their issues with the term bicurious. Eddy said ‘Katy bloody Perry, with whom I’m not best pleased’ (P15, Eddy), and Lucy was clearly angered by the lyrics and the way in which the song was giving bisexuality the wrong kind of visibility:

‘I think we should be more visible, I think we should talk about it more, and claim it and say “no, no no that bisexual is not what I am”, that is not (mm) what most women are, (mm) y’know it’s really not, and I fucking hate it, all that Katy Perry “I kissed a girl and I liked it, I hope my boyfriend doesn’t mind it” and all this, it’s like, “fuck off”’ (P19, Lucy).

I turn now to discuss the women’s talk of bisexual people as (mis)represented as promiscuous. Bisexuality was often linked with promiscuity (e.g., Ault, 1996; McLean, 2008b). The social sciences literature had identified that one common understanding of bisexual people was that they need to engage in sexual activity with both men and women simultaneously. This feeds into the idea of bisexual people’s desire as ‘raging
out of control’ and consequently having ‘erotic relationships with “anything that moves”’ (Esterberg, 2002:215).

Lucy thinks that bisexuality ‘brings up connotations of just promiscuity basically’ (P19, Lucy). Roxy considered that: ‘there’s an assumption within the heterosexual population and within the homosexual population […] bisexual people are promiscuous, thus they are a threat (mm) to my relationship’ (P8, Roxy). Marie suggested that promiscuity was down to misunderstanding, and that it did not fit with how she understood her sexuality:

‘I think people have a real problem with bisexuality, they don’t really understand it (mm) or they think it’s a lie, or that you’re just wanna sleep with everybody (laughs) (mm, mm). Which I don’t really think is the case it’s just that, I think with me, I just have a more open perspective on who I could fall in love with’ (P13, Marie).

The women’s narrative rejects the concept of bisexuality as primarily about sex, instead linking identity with sexual and emotional connections, such as love. In the past Ruth, who was now polyamorous herself, had felt that ‘there was a cultural assumption that you couldn’t be bi (mm) and stick with one person’ (P16, Ruth). Marie pointed out the flaw in the logic behind the notion that ‘if you’re a bisexual then you are just going to go out and sleep with everyone’ when she said:

‘if you’re straight you fancy men, and if you’re going out with a man no one kind of [says], “oh but you’re just gonna go and sleep with loads of other men” (mm), in the same way if you’re gay, people aren’t like “oh well you must actually just be using them and soon you’re gonna drop them and sleep with someone else”. Cos that’s not how heterosexual or homosexual relationships are seen (mm). Whereas the stereotype is that you can’t commit, or you don’t (mm) want to commit, you just wanna go off with anyone (yeah) which I think’s a real shame. Because it’s not true (laughs)’ (P13, Marie).

Rose said ‘I’m a serial monogamist by the way. I’m hoping I’ve settled down for life now but I have definitely been a serial monogamist’ (P12, Rose), and for Roxy her identity ‘involves monogamy and commitment’ (P8, Roxy), and she is cynical of the notion that bisexuality necessarily means non-monogamy:
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‘It’s just silly isn’t it, I mean, just (sighs) you might like, I don’t know, spaghetti hoops and apple pie, but you wouldn’t eat them together [...] it’s just so stupid you know, the idea that a woman will [...] have sex with another woman and a man at the same time (mm) I think is a heterosexual fantasy’ (P8, Roxy).

On the other hand, seven of the women (most of whom were involved in bisexual communities) had been or were polyamorous themselves, and a further three (Alex, Blue, and Rose) discussed being open to the idea. Alex and Blue were monogamous but expressed interest and intrigue in the idea of polyamory:

‘[T]hat was what was so liberating when I went to Bicon (mm) polyamory is open, honest, y’know and (mm) actually I think it’s very very difficult (mm) and I think I’m in full admiration of it rather than lying and cheating (mm) and sneaking around’ (P9, Alex).

‘I find it funny at the [bisexual] coffee group with the different, who was with who (mm). I found that completely intriguing (mm) like the sort of inquisitive side of me was just too sort of like y’know “so you’re with her, and her, and him” (laughs) y’know, “who’s with him”. That’s quite good, I thought that was just, I loved the freedom of it (mm.) I loved the fact that it contrasts so much to, every other situation that you’re in, y’know (P20, Blue).

Bisexuality offered (the potential for) freedom in how the women managed their relationships. Rose also discussed how she had contemplated, but ultimately rejected, non-monogamy for practical and emotional reasons. For her, multiple relationships involved too much effort, as she says, ‘how much energy does one have’ (P12, Rose).

She spoke of polyamory as the ideal, but felt that part of the difficulty would be:

‘a lot to do with society as well [...] if it was acceptable ... for people to ... (sighs) relate intimately with more than one person (mm) and if we all had the kind of level of personal integrity and self-confidence not to be threatened by (mm) somebody we’re intimate with being intimate with somebody else (mm) then, maybe it could work, but, we’re not there yet are we?’ (P12, Rose).

Rose draws attention then, to how polyamory challenges what makes an ‘acceptable’ relationship (e.g., Ritchie & Barker, 2005; 2006; Barker & Ritchie, 2007). Portrayals of relationships which privilege monogamous heterosexual couple relationships are clearly visible, for example, in romantic stories, in law, and in mainstream mass media

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(e.g., Ritchie & Barker, 2006; Barker & Ritchie, 2007). However, traditional relationships can be understood to be heterosexist and hegemonic (Barker & Ritchie, 2007; Sheff, 2006). To have more than one partner (especially of more than one gender) troubles these mainstream patriarchal understandings of relationships (Klesse, 2006; Noël, 2006; Ritchie & Barker, 2006; Barker & Ritchie, 2007; Sheff, 2006). Those who have multiple partners often understand polyamory as a revolutionary (and sometimes feminist) choice, which breaks down these restrictive mononormative, monosexual, and monogamous relationship boundaries (e.g., Klesse, 2006; Noël, 2006; Ritchie & Barker, 2006; Barker & Ritchie, 2007). Claire was polyamorous, and this quotation captures her understanding that mainstream constructions of bisexuality and polyamory are problematic:

‘It’s also about kind of sex negativity and greed because I think bisexuality’s seen as this hypersexual identity and so if people are bisexual, and if they’re talking about it, then it must mean that they’re not monogamous and therefore it must mean that they’re promiscuous, and that’s all terrible because we mustn’t ever have sex apart from the one person blah blah blah (mm) or at least if we do it we mustn’t admit to it and we must feel very terrible about it (mm), and so there is that kind of conflation, and it is a complete conflation, of like bisexuality and non-monogamy ... so yeah that’s a load of bollocks and so, but yeah so people always throw that book at you and telling you that you’re greedy and all the rest of it’ (P14, Claire).

Research with polyamorous people (some of whom were bisexual), has identified that to those who practice ‘poly’ (Ritchie & Barke, 2005; 2006; Barker & Ritchie, 2007), or have ‘multiple relationships’ (Klesse, 2006), do not conceive of their relationships as purely sexual. Instead, they emphasise emotional connections, intimacy, and love, and prioritise openness, honesty, and respect towards their multiple partners (Ritchie & Barker, 2005; 2006; Klesse; 2006; Sheff, 2006; Barker & Ritchie, 2007). Therefore, polyamory is understood to disrupt not only the concept of monogamy, but also of perceptions that loving relationships are necessarily sexual ones (Ritchie & Barker, 2006; Klesse, 2006).

This is far removed from other literature, where allegations of bisexual people and their promiscuity are hinged on simplistic and dismissive understandings of simply having lots of sex with ‘anyone and everyone’. This feeds the notion that bisexual
people are likely to be dishonest (Ritchie & Barker, 2006 Barker & Ritchie, 2007), cheat on their partners (McLean, 2008b; Morrison, Harrington & McDermott, 2010), and be highly risky sexual partners who are likely to be diseased (e.g., Esterberg, 2002; Rust, 2002; Fish, 2006; Esterberg, 2007). As Claire said ‘I think with the straight community it’s all about bloody HIV (mm). Cos there is that kind of like ‘bisexuals are the vector of transmission’ (P14, Claire). Sandy said ‘I remember my mother when I was a kid saying that bisexuals were dirty (laughs) [...] she’s like “yeah yeah they’re responsible for the spread of AIDS”’ (P10, Sandy). Therefore, it is likely that bisexual women are not only misunderstood (and therefore stigmatised) through their identity label, but also through their (assumed but also real) relationship practices. In this section I have explored the ways in which these women believed that their bisexual identity and relationship practices were strongly misrepresented within British society and contemporary culture.
2. "It is this kind of unicorn identity": Fixidity, Fluidity and Freedom

Whereas the focus in the previous theme was on other people’s (mis)understandings of bisexuality, this theme introduces the ways in which the women understood and made sense of their own bisexuality.

**Attracted to both: upholding the binaries**

When asked, some of these self-identified bisexual women provided definitions based on attraction, rather than sexual behaviour (e.g., Eadie, 1993; Entrup & Firestein, 2007). Gemma said ‘I s’pose being attracted to either sex’ (P1, Gemma). Emily described a bisexual person to be ‘someone that’s attracted, sexually attracted to men and women’ (P3, Emily) and Betty says ‘someone who has ... male and female partners not necessarily in a sexual way but just feels sexually, emotionally, mentally (mm), attracted to both sexes’ (P2, Betty). Marie described a bisexual person as ‘someone that’s open to relationships with people from both sexes really’ (P13, Marie), and similarly Rose said ‘I think my definition of bisexuality would be, being open to the capacity to have ... intimate, including physical and sexual relationship with either gender’ (P11, Rose). Although the idea of a sexual relationship is included in Rose’s definition, it is about a capacity for sexual relationships with *either* sex/gender, rather than a necessity for relationships with *both* sexes/genders.

These accounts, common in those women who were not members of bisexual community, prioritise attraction over sexual behaviour, and are therefore in contrast to negative stereotypes of bisexual people as simply sex obsessed (Eliason, 2001; Israel & Mohr, 2004; Fairington, 2008; Morrison et al., 2010). Millie mentions the physical body when describing bisexual identity:

‘to me it’s actually being attracted to a personality, and an individual, rather than the gender (mm hm). I think it’s little about someone’s physicality (mm) and I think that’s certainly how I’ve experienced it, although I think, obviously, y’know, bits do count’ (P4, Millie).

Millie, like many of the women, notices sex/gender, but does not see attraction as constrained by it, because what takes priority is ‘the person’ (Diamond, 2003). These women’s understandings located bisexuality as a permanent ‘third identity position’ in addition to heterosexuality and homosexuality. This ‘third identity’ ultimately maintains binary understandings of sex and gender a, by relying on them in order to
exist (Rust, 2004; Petford, 2003; Barker, Richards & Bowes-Catton, 2009). When bisexual identity is conceived of as a third category, it invariably becomes fundamentally ‘similar’ to the categories of homosexual and heterosexual, because it is understood to be a fixed and permanent identity (e.g., Gammon & Isgro, 2006; Bowes-Catton, 2007; Barker et al., 2009). This can be useful in attempts to achieve inclusion for bisexual people, for example in laws and equality policies (e.g., Clarke & Turner, 2007; Barker et al., 2009), which in turn allows the potential to lay the foundations of bisexual validity and visibility. However, there are also limitations to the idea of reinforcing the notion of bisexuality as a third identity, which I discuss below.

Those women who had some bisexual community involvement tended to conceptualise sex/gender as less binary. Trans people are (relatively) visible in some bisexual communities\(^ \text{126} \), and Alex and Adele drew a on a wider understanding of gender when defining bisexuality:

‘[I]t’s more complicated than this, but in a simplistic way sort of, emotionally and sexually attracted to both, and increasingly I would say, y’know, all the different genders that there are (right), having met more trans people recently’ (P9, Alex).

‘I think open to the possibility of having relationships regardless of gender (mm). I did used to say someone who’s attracted to both men and women, but then discovered there’s more than just men and women (laughter) out there’ (P18, Adele).

Heterosexuality and homosexuality are monosexual identities, and the people who occupy them ‘choose their romantic partners on the basis of their biological sex’ (Fish, 2006). However, these bisexual women defied monosexual dualistic understandings of attraction, and for those who had encountered trans people, they also uncoupled their attraction from solely binary understandings of sex/gender.

**Fifty-fifty, or bye bye binary?**

Since Kinsey published the continuum theory of bisexuality (Kinsey, Pomeroy & Martin, 1948), bisexual identity has sometimes been conceptualised as ‘in the middle’ of heterosexuality and homosexuality. From this, has stemmed the notion that bisexual people are fifty percent attracted to women and fifty percent to men.

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\(^{126}\) At Bicon 2004, nearly one in five of attendees described their gender as ‘trans’ or ‘genderqueer’ (Barker, Bowes-Catton, Lantaffi, Cassidy & Brewer, 2008).
(Yoshino, 2000; Page, 2007). Some of these women specifically referred to bisexuality as on a scale or continuum, but their definitions did not necessarily position bisexual identity as existing at a fixed middle point on the scale:

‘I kind of feel like, there’s quite a sliding scale. And although conventionally we’re quite socially conditioned to ... either think that we’re gay or straight (yeah), actually I think there’s like gay here, straight here, and then like everyone is pretty much somewhere on the scale in the middle (mm). And I think we’re just conditioned to think that we should be one or the other (mm), and also, with bisexual, it’s very much, it makes ... it sound like you’re fifty-fifty (mm hm) and I don’t really consider myself fifty-fifty’ (P6, Sarah).

In others though, fifty-fifty notions were apparent. In Elizabeth’s quotation, she revealed that she understood bisexuality as underpinned by a ‘complete’ bisexuality which is located ‘in the middle’, and Eddy highlights the risks of disputing such understandings:

‘I always think bisexuality’s on a line, and you’re on that line somewhere. Either you’re fifty per cent, in the middle, which my exes have been, and they’re completely bisexual (mm), but I think somewhere along there, you’re something or other (mm). Even if it’s down to being tactile with your friends and you think you’re completely straight, I think you’re somewhere on that line so I think yeah I, just go up and down it occasionally (laughs)’ (P7, Elizabeth).

‘it gets slightly annoying when I see leaflets and they say [...] “no bisexual is entirely attracted to both sexes equally” and I’m thinking like, “thanks for trying to break down a common stereotype, and thus creating another common stereotype” which y’know, I think that’s rubbish’ (P15, Eddy).

Scales and continuums clearly uphold binary understandings because ‘the existence of a category depends on the existence of another category to compare it to’ (Murphy, 1997:39). In the case of bisexual identity, it in fact requires two categories to relate to in order to exist (Angelides, 2006).

Others definitions did not explicitly refer to scales and continuums. Sandy understood bisexual people as having made ‘the decision to remain open ended in their sexuality, or the decision, not the decision as such, but the feeling of being fluid [...] nothing’s fixed’ (P10, Sandy). One way of understanding a fluid bisexuality is as a malleable
mixture of homosexual and heterosexual, and partly for this reason, it has been suggested that the notion of fluidity continues to rely on the binaries which it challenges in order to sustain its existence (Lingel, 2009). For example, this was in evidence when Sandy drew on ‘gay’ and ‘straight’ to define her own fluid identity. She said ‘y’know some days I’m more gay than others, and some days I’m more straight than others’ (P10, Sandy). Fluidity versions of bisexuality can therefore intrinsically reaffirm the binary categories which they try to resist (Lingel, 2009). For Sandy, although her version of fluidity bolstered binary sexual identities, the ‘rules’ of them could be broken:

‘[l]t’s less defined that it used to be [...] everyone’s a lot more fluid, I’ve got a lot of friends who are men who have had experiences with men (mm), and a lot of friends who are female who have had experiences with a female, but who still identify as heterosexual [...] And I feel like everyone’s more fluid’ (P10, Sandy).

For other women, bisexuality was about breaking down boundaries, and rejecting identity categories. Therefore, it was not surprising that the women’s narratives of fluidity sometimes involved a rejection of the identity category of ‘bisexual’. Blue said ‘I think it’s all very fluid, I think (mm) at certain times in your life y’know, you can want to be with women and then not, and for me it’s just fluidity (mm). So I would say I’m probably not bisexual, in that I’m just fluid’ (P20, Blue). Similarly, Marie said ‘I think with bisexuality because it’s so fluid, you know, you can’t really pinpoint an identity onto it’ (P13, Marie). These rejections of labels are the logical conclusion when bisexuality is conceptualised as a fluid identity, because there is both ‘an affirmation of a specifically bisexual identity, and simultaneously, a challenge to the notion of identity more generally’ (Nathanson, 2009:81, also see Barker et al., 2009; Lingel, 2009).

**Bye bye bisexuality?**

An alternative understanding draws on fluidity, but instead of relying on categories, tries to reject them entirely. Queer theorists (in particular Butler, 1990/2006), have critiqued binary understandings of sex, gender, and sexual identity categories, demonstrating that they are socially constructed. In queer and social constructionist accounts, bisexual identity defies the rigidity and ‘fixedness’ of identity labels (Eadie, 1993; Burrill, 2002; Hemmings, 2002; Gammon & Isgro, 2006; Parker, Adams &
Phillips, 2007; Nathanson, 2009). Queer has become a term which (partly) represents a
deconstruction of binaries, and a challenge to the ‘dominant system of sex, gender,
and sexuality’ (Du Plessis, 1996:32). It has been highlighted that bisexual (and trans)
identities trouble conventional binary understandings of sex and gender (Du Plessis,
1996; Drechsler, 2004; Barker et al., 2009). Some of the women who were involved in
bisexual communities, specifically engaged (knowingly or not) with discussions
which echoed queer narratives of sexuality. Blue and Claire engaged with the idea of
the rigid boundaries of sexuality disappearing:

‘the whole idea of defining sexuality at all crumbles when you start talking about
any of this, because straight falls to pieces, homosexual falls to pieces (mm), and
so does bisexual [...] It’s just sexuality, it isn’t bisexuality, it isn’t homosexuality,
and it isn’t heterosexuality either’ (P20, Blue).

‘I think that the liberating potential of bisexuality is huge (mm). And, if we could
be coherent and visible about that then it would be massive, it would be a really
important and liberatory and emancipatory thing but, how do you go about
being coherently and visibly bisexual in a in a world (mm) that seems determined
to see only binaries’ (P14, Claire).

Claire’s thoughts echoed the literature, which has identified that when embracing
queer narratives, it becomes difficult to articulate any sense of identity. In dismissing
all identity labels, there is a risk of further perpetuating the invisibility of bisexuality,
because it disappears entirely (e.g., Burrill, 2002; Gammon & Isgro, 2006; Barker &
Langdriddle, 2010). Further, to even talk about sexuality requires drawing on the only
available language which is rooted in the very binary models it seeks to reject (Barker
et al., 2009).

Some of the participants acknowledged their dissatisfaction with labels, and yet
recognised that to dispense with them entirely could be the wrong strategy for
furthering a better understanding of bisexuality:

‘I spent until I was twenty trying to pretend I was straight, I spent until I was
twenty-four trying to pretend I was a lesbian, and I find it all just a bit like, (yeah)

122 That it was bisexual community members who engaged with these narratives is unsurprising
in light of the high percentage of ‘queer’ attendees at events such as Bicon (e.g., 51% at Bicon
2004, see Barker, Bowes-Catton, Iantaffi, Cassidy & Brewer, 2008; Barker, et al., 2009).
why do you need those things? Actually it would be much easier if we all just said “well I am Lucy” and that could be that. And that would be much more straightforward I think. But in a label people can quantify you can’t they, and then they can deal with you’ (P19, Lucy).

‘I think at the moment it [bisexuality] really is almost invisible, that it is this kind of unicorn identity that nobody takes seriously. And until we’ve got basic recognition that it is a possibility (mm), an ethical possibility, and doesn’t imply that somebody is ... mentally unstable sexually unhinged or something (mm, mm) I’m happy for there to be a category there, I’m delighted that it will help people articulate things (mm). I think my lovely world in which this all becomes irrelevant because, y’know, gender becomes a matter of personal choice and (mm) sexuality is not relevant anymore, that’s not gonna happen. So within the current set up (mm) it’s nice to have a name for it’ (P15, Eddy).

Lucy and Eddy make clear that identity labels are both restrictive, but also potentially enabling, which has been presented in some psychological and sociological literature as the difficult decision between assimilation and separation (e.g., Gamson, 1995; Bowes-Catton, 2007). The women’s talk echoed what has been termed the ‘queer dilemma’ (Gamson, 1995). U.S. sociologist Joshua Gamson summarised the inherent problems of embracing or rejecting labels when he wrote that ‘fixed identity categories are both the basis for oppression and the basis for political power’ (Gamson, 1995:391).

The options the women presented were of positioning bisexuality identity within the binary, or to dispense with identity altogether. If bisexual identity exists as a third individual identity, then bisexual people have the option to attempt political mobilisation, through visible and public collective identities and communities. To do so allows the potential for actualising affirmative understandings of bisexuality and bisexual people (Gamson, 1995; Gammon & Isgro, 2006; Bowes-Catton, 2007), and is a strategy similar to that of the lesbian and gay rights movement (Gamson, 1995; Clarke & Peel, 2007b; also see Chapter Two). However, this type of strategy relies on situating bisexual identity within the very understandings that regulate and dismiss it (Angelides, 2006). This means the risk of continual stigmatisation, which makes bisexual people feel like outsiders, due to their defiance of binary monosexuality
(Gamson, 1995; Petford, 2003; Angelides, 2006). However, to destabilise identity, is to destabilise the political ground on which it stands (Gamson, 1995).

Discussion

This research makes a considerable contribution to the literature on biphobia (Eliason, 1997; Mohr & Rochlen, 1999; Herek, 2002; Welzer-Lang, 2008; Esterberg, 2008b; Ross et al., 2010), bisexual identity (e.g., Esterberg, 2002; Diamond, 2003; 2005a; 2005b; Gammon & Isgro, 2006; Bowes-Catton, 2007; Barker, Richards & Bowes-Catton, 2009), and on (mis)understandings of bisexuality (see, Chapter Three). This is the first qualitative research based on the accounts of British bisexual participants, and that these women were all keen to discuss their experiences of (mis)understandings, and (mis)representations of bisexuality, indicates that this is a topic that is of great importance to them. For this reason, my research identifies that more psychological research investigating bisexual men and women’s experiences of their identity, and others’ understandings of it, is required. Further investigation would allow for an unravelling of the impact that biphobic beliefs have upon bisexual people and their lived realities.

Further, this research has moved beyond previous literature which has mainly only theorised U.K. LGBT space as lacking cohesiveness or inclusivity (e.g., Clarke & Rúdólfsdóttir, 2005; Clarke & Peel, 2007b, Gurevich, et al., 2007) to evidencing some of the explicit ways in which LGBT space is not a cohesive or inclusive reality for these bisexual women. The participants in these interviews were unsure of how they fitted, either within heterosexual mainstream society, or in (multiple) LGBT spaces. The women were constantly negotiating where they could ‘fit in’, and be ‘out’.

This research is one of the first studies which begins to recognise and unpick how the stigmatisation of bisexual women (by lesbians) may be largely about their association with men. This is another topic worthy of further study in order to understand how lesbians and bisexual women can overcome the unease and tensions that seemingly still exist between them (e.g., Rust, 1993b; 1995; Garber, 1995/2000; Ault, 1996a; McLean, 2008b.)

One critical finding was that there was a relatively pronounced split between bisexual women who were members of bisexual communities, and those who were not, both in relation to how they understood their own identity, and how they managed their
relationship practices. Therefore, these findings evidence that it is not sufficient to
draw only on community samples when undertaking research on the topic of
bisexuality. However, future research specifically with bisexual community members
would be of great value in understanding how, or whether, membership of such
communities plays a part in their support/social networks, their relationships, and
their wellbeing.

Overall, the women’s perception was that negative (mis)understandings of their
identities were abundant in the wider culture. Their talk showed that this lack of
tolerance, understanding, or inclusiveness was underpinned by mononormative,
monosexual, and binary conceptualisations. In their own understandings of their
bisexuality, the women provided narratives which disputed these negative
understandings. In describing their identity, the women both drew upon, and rejected
binary understandings of their bisexuality. This contributes an understanding of
biphobia which is extremely valuable, and which could become the underpinning of
future research which develops strategies, and policies, to attempt to replace
misinformation with understanding. This could be particularly important in relation to
the term ‘bicuriosity’. This is the only research which has spoken to bisexual women
about their understandings of this term. It would be interesting to investigate this
further, and consider whether bicurious versions of bisexuality are a valid identity for
some, or whether they merely represent a media driven commodification of bisexual
identity (e.g., Wilkinson, 1996a; Barker et al., 2008; George, 2009).

This research has been extremely useful in offering a contemporary perspective on
how these bisexual women conceive of their own bisexual identities. It was apparent
that they had multiple understandings of bisexuality, which were sometimes
ambivalent; the women embraced and distanced themselves from (particular
understandings of) bisexuality (Bower, et al., 2002; Ochs, 2007). In summary, these
findings have provided a deeper insight into bisexual women’s perspectives of bisexual
identity and biphobia. Future research which explores bisexual people’s
understandings of their own sexual identity would be useful in order to add to the
existing body of (often theory based) literature.
“I can’t build up an image in my head of bisexuality”:
Bisexual women’s (lack of) visual identity

Having established the ways in which the women understood their identity more widely, in this second analysis chapter I turn now to the women’s visual identity, and discuss the appearance related themes identified in the data. Some of the women gave me permission to use their photographs in my thesis, and a number of these images are included in this chapter. It is important to note that they do not form part of the thematic analysis per se. I include them because although the intention of using them was purely as a data collection aid, they became an integral part of the women’s talk. I include a photograph of each of these women after their first quote, not because they are linked in any way to that particular quote, but instead because they capture the visual aspect of the interviews, within this study of visual identity. By including them in this results section I also hope to allow the reader some insight into the types of photographs that the participants included, and to show the varied dress and appearance of these bisexual women.

In this chapter, I draw on the literature discussed in Part One of this thesis to analyse the women’s talk about dress, appearance, and wider identity. There are a few psychologists who have conducted research around the topic of bisexuality and appearance (as discussed in Chapter One). Myers, Taub, Morris, and Rothblum (1999) drew attention to how their qualitative study of appearance norms in U.S. lesbian communities was unable to include a full account of bisexual experience, due to a relative lack of specifically bisexual communities. Taub (1999) suggested that more research was required in order to increase psychological knowledge of bisexual women and their perceptions of beauty and appearance. Similarly Clarke and Turner (2007) concluded from their British qualitative research with young lesbians, gay men, and bisexual women, that bisexual women could not identify any appearance norms for bisexuality. They suggested that more research was required in order to unpick the specificity of bisexual appearance, and this research, and the analysis reported in this chapter, makes a unique contribution in filling the gap in
understanding the specificities of bisexual visual identity. This will be one of the first 
British studies to focus on bisexual women as a specific group (rather than as part of 
a wider study of LGB or queer appearance). It will also be the first psychological 
research to ask bisexual women how (or whether) they manage their appearance in 
relation to their identities, with the use of a visual method to facilitate the 
discussion. This has wider implications in relation to their sense of self and well-
being, and their wider visibility as stigmatised members of mainstream western 
society.

The first theme is Visible Lesbians, in which the women demonstrated their awareness 
of lesbian looks and looking, and their associated identity. In Invisible Bisexuals, I show 
how, in stark contrast, the women were unable to recognise bisexual women through 
appearance, but how these women saw their bisexuality an important part of their 
identity, which they would like to recognised and acknowledged. In the third theme, 
(In)Distinctly Bisexual I discuss how participants gave complex narratives about theirs 
and others’ appearance, which indicated that despite their lack of access to a distinct 
visual identity, the women negotiated ways in which to incorporate their bisexual 
identity in their dress and appearance.
1. Visible Lesbians

These bisexual women painted a picture of lesbians as visible, through their clothed bodies, but further, they also perceived a ‘lesbian look’ to be a reflection of an intrinsically associated (distinctly lesbian) identity.

“Oh my God, that’s a hundred footer”: Lesbians as literally visible

Some of the women were confident in their assertion that lesbians are recognisable. However, others were hesitant to describe a lesbian look. This was apparent in how they made clear that they were only describing a stereotype, which did not necessarily reflect their own opinion. They therefore advocated caution in how ‘accurate’ their answers were. For example, Millie ended her discussion of a ‘lesbian look’ with the caveat ‘that’s probably in terms of kinda, the clichés’ (P4, Millie). Sarah said:

‘I guess, lesbian, you know, like, if, stereotypically, if a woman’s quite butch, then people might tend to think that she’s lesbian (laughs) (yep) but erm ... yeah, like I know that, erm, some gay women might more identify with dressing up more as like, you know, like, in a couple you might get, erm, someone who’s more feminine (mm) and someone who’s more masculine, but I don’t really know that much (laughter)’ (P6, Sarah).

In this quotation, Sarah’s hesitance manifested itself in her use of ‘erms’ and ‘likes’, and in her tentativeness, shown in the terminology she chooses, for example, ‘I guess’, ‘might’, ‘tend’, and her reference to only ‘some’ (not all) gay women. Sarah did not take ownership of her description of lesbian appearance, but distanced herself from it by saying that it is ‘people’ (not necessarily her), that might think that lesbians are

\[\text{\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{128}However, in some interviews their hesitant answer may have reflected my tentativeness in asking questions about appearance. On reflection, how tentative I was depended on how comfortable I felt with each participant. For example, with Emily, I confidently asked ‘how would you define a lesbian look, what things would stand out for you as being lesbian?’ When I asked Sarah, I was more tentative, and phrased the question: ‘just to begin with erms, are you aware of any kind of ‘norms’ about lesbian and gay appearance ... any things that would lead you to identify someone?’}}\]
butch and femme\textsuperscript{129}. Her closing statement serves as a denial that she has any experiential knowledge of the topic. The women’s inclusion of words such as ‘stereotypes’ and ‘clichés’ indicated that they did not feel entirely entitled to comment on lesbian appearance\textsuperscript{130}, which implies that they understand their identity to be different from that of a lesbian.

Despite distancing themselves from their descriptions, they were consistently able to recognise a lesbian look, which was understood to differentiate lesbians from ‘other women’:

‘[My friend] has incredible gaydar and we’ll be walking down the street and he’ll just be like “oh my God, that’s a hundred footer”, which is this expression he has which means that he can see them from a hundred foot off’ (P10, Sandy).

\begin{center}
\textit{Photograph P10: Sandy}
\end{center}

\textsuperscript{129}In Chapter Nine, I discuss how heterosexual students used similar strategies to distance themselves from their understandings of sexuality and appearance, and draw on the literature on ‘disclaimers’ in order to explore the reasons that participants might do this.

\textsuperscript{130}In these interviews, the boundaries between lesbian and bisexual women appeared blurred. Some of the women’s talk sometimes indicated that they felt themselves to be insiders, who were entitled to comment on matters of lesbian identity, while at other times (some of the) women shied away from doing so.
In common with previous findings there were references to ‘butch and femme’ lesbians, but what was typically provided was an image of the masculine looking butch lesbian (Krakauer & Rose, 2002; Clarke & Turner, 2007; Johnson, Gill, Reichman & Tessinary, 2007; Rothblum, 2010). Amy commented that a lesbian was recognisable when she was ‘more like a man (mm) it, it stands out a mile’ (P12, Amy). Blue stated ‘I think erm, y’know you kind of have the, the really ... manly kind of look (mm hm). Y’know that, that almost sometimes you could be mistake[n] you could think that it is a man’ (P20, Blue). Lucy, who had previously identified as a lesbian, placed some emphasis on shoes (e.g., Rothblum, 1994a; Clarke & Turner, 2007):

‘I mean it’s what I would always see as an indicator in other women, what shoes are they wearing, what kind are they wearing, big massive boots? Because if they are, it’s much more likely. If they’ve got great big massive stilettos on you can look as dykey as you want but those stilettos just, that you know that it’s not, (laughs) it’s just an image thing, [...] but, it is, I mean it’s short hair, it’s men’s clothes’ (P19, Lucy).
Lesbians may also appear masculine due to their lack of engagement with traditional practices of femininity. As Gemma says ‘I’ve never quite understood the sort of lesbian look because I’ve always thought, “why try and ... defeminise?”’ (P1, Gemma). The lesbian look was the make-up free, hairy bodied, short haired woman. When I asked Millie about the appearance of lesbians, she stated:

‘I guess for lesbian women (mm hm), the kind of typical y’know, the boiler suit and the shaved head or the dungarees, or the kind of, lumberjack shirts thing or the slightly suspicious possible masculine haircut [...] I guess that brings us to the area of body hair with, with women (mm hm), lesbians are perceived as being more hairy, or not quite so keen on having a shave’ (P4, Millie).

These participants positioned the lesbian as essentially feminine, in that to produce her masculinity she has ‘defeminised’ (as Gemma termed it). Therefore, it is not that the lesbian is essentially masculine, but instead she has actively rejected traditionally feminine practices, such as having long hair and removing body hair. As a result of this, the lesbian woman becomes visible through her lack of engagement with particular beauty practices. However, this can mean that butch lesbians are positioned as ‘failing’ at being women, through their ‘failing’ to comply with (heteronormative) conventions of beauty and appearance. The butch lesbian may consequently be branded as lazy and unattractive, which can make her more susceptible to negative evaluations (see Rothblum, 1994a), and homophobic abuse (e.g., Namaste, 1996a; Eves, 2004).

There was variation in how nuanced, or knowing, the women’s descriptions of lesbians were, which may have related to whether they were involved in lesbian or LGBT communities. Berni and Blue, who socialised on ‘the scene’, were able to identify different ‘types’ of lesbian looks which echoed those in popular culture, as described in Chapter Two (e.g., Tracey & Pokorny, 1996; Drinkwater, 2003; Phineas, 2008; Bertrand, 2009):
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"[A]nd ... bulls [bull- dykes] I would say ... typical military type haircut. Or in terms of a baby dyke, like the spiky Alex Parks\textsuperscript{132} look (yep), and with clothes, big jeans (a ha), t-shirt with a collar, shirt, ... yeah I'd go with that [...] I've got lots of older lesbian friends (mm hm) older being fifties, sixties (yeah) and they are all that stereotype, they are all y'know, buzz cut and y'know, shirt, trousers, shoes all the time' (PS, Berni).

"[J]eans, and, and shirts, literally farmer's shirts (mm). And y'know, women would literally look like the sort of like butch, kind of stone dyke. Y'know that kind of image (mm). That American stone dyke idea isn't it (mm). No make-up, no bras, no lingerie, any accoutrement that could be vaguely classed as feminine in any way whatsoever is absolutely out of the window (mm hm). That extreme. And then you have what I would call the trendy androgynous dyke [...]. Y'know, that kind of short hair, tats, piercings (yep) most lesbians just gonna fall on the floor and die for that kind of image (mm) but generally tends to be pretty women, quite skinny, you can't really say that these, they're not like that kind of butch dyke' (P20, Blue).

Berni's talk evidences that 'lesbian looks' remain influenced by (or at least visible within) popular cultural sources, and both these women suggest that these 'looks' are plural (e.g., baby dyke, bull dyke, stone dyke) and constantly evolving (e.g., Rothblum 1994a; Esterberg, 1996a; Kaiser, 1998; Winn & Nutt, 2001; Clarke & Turner, 2007). Berni and Blue also took ownership of their descriptions (perhaps a reflection of their involvement in LGBT communities), evident in their somewhat more assertive language (Berni's 'I would say' and Blue's 'you have what I would call'), and in their use of the word 'dyke' which is an appropriated term, reclaimed by some lesbians from heterosexual society, who have used it only to indicate perversion (e.g., Farquhar, 2000).

The women were also able to pinpoint what brands of clothes a lesbian might wear, as Lucy said 'there are certain labels that are lesbian to my mind (mm mm). Like Converse

\textsuperscript{132}Alex Parks was an 'out' lesbian singer, who won the BBC TV talent show Fame Academy in 2003 (http://www.alex-parks.co.uk).
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is quite a lesbian label (mm mm), leather boots, Caterpillar boots’ (P19, Lucy). Berni
too identified brands associated with lesbian sexuality:

‘[Y]ou know, the Bench lesbian look (right) y’know the big Bench trousers the
functional top […] Cahartt (mm hm) Diesel […] y’know, your generic lesbian will
shop in, H and M […] I’d say that’s just typically more the butch look, but ... I don’t
know I’d still say Diesel with the femme look and also maybe some surfy names
like O’Neill, Animal (yep) that sort of thing (yep), that would be for butch or
femme look (P5, Berni).

However, these bisexual women did not associate any brands specifically with
bisexuality. That particular brands can be markers of lesbian sexual identity has also
been found in previous research (e.g., Holliday, 1999; Clarke & Turner, 2007), and
fashion labels can enunciate sexual identity and contribute to ‘looking the part’
(Holliday, 1999). However, they can make some lesbians (e.g., femme, or working
class) feel excluded due to their lack of capital to consume the ‘correct’ garments
(Eves, 2004; Taylor, 2007; 2008).

It was apparent that some ‘lesbian looks’ were attractive, but the butch lesbian was
not. In the above quotation, Blue’s ‘types’ of lesbians seemed to be ranked from least
attractive to most attractive. Further, when she described the ‘pretty’ androgynous
look, it was in direct contrast to the ‘kind of butch dyke’, who by implication is not
‘pretty’ (P20, Blue). ‘Pretty’ seemed to be a synonym for ‘feminine’ in some extracts,
and consequently (butch) lesbians who do choose to resist traditional femininity can
only appear unsexy:

‘[A] few of my friends who subscribe to the stereotypes (mm) don’t ... take any
pride in themselves? God I sound like my mother, but, like ... well, case in point,
underwear is, well, mine’s all kind of lacy and colourful […] but, hers [lesbian
friend] is kind of very plain and basic (right) but it’s not very clean (right). Y’know
(okay), it’s just a kind of, “I don’t have to bother because I’m a (mm) butch lesbian
and we don’t do underwear”, it’s like, “darling nobody is going to want to take it
off in this state”’ (P8, Roxy).
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Photograph P8: Roxy

Alex stated that when men found out that she was in a relationship with a woman they were surprised because: ‘they think “oh, but she doesn’t conform to my stereotype of a butch lesbian” [...] it’s like “ooh well, I thought lesbians were all ugly and hairy and (mm) horrible but she’s not’ (P9, Alex).

Photograph P9: Alex’s shoes
Similarly Matilda admitted her surprise at noticing ‘attractive’ women in a gay club:

’[W]e went to a gay bar and there was just the most stunning women you have ever seen. And I remember saying to my cousin, “they can’t be lesbians” (laughter). I mean they all looked like supermodels (right). And then, and then afterwards I thought “that’s such a ridiculous (mm) thing to say and why did I think that that was the case”, but I was like, [whispers] “no, they can’t be”’ (P17, Matilda).

Matilda’s closing comment reveals her to be an outsider from community space (although she does take ownership of her opinion), hence it is apparent that even the women who were not members of communities were able to draw on identity ‘stereotypes’, and appearance norms for lesbians.

“I can’t tell from a picture, but I can tell from talking to somebody”: Embodied sexuality

This section explores how recognition of lesbian identity was about not only the adorned body, but also to do with an embodied identity. The most evocative examples were provided by women who had specifically mentioned to me that they previously identified as lesbians\(^\text{133}\), or by those who socialised in LGBT spaces, reflecting these women’s greater sub-cultural capital and experiential authority.

One way in which the women incorporated notions of embodiment, was through their implication that lesbian identity entails anger and aggression. Alex said ‘the sort of Dykes to Watch Out For\(^\text{134}\) stereotype of (mm), y’know, jeans, Doc Martens, no make-up, short hair erm, dt ... pretty angry (laughs)’ (P9, Alex), thereby directly linking appearance and ‘attitude. Meanwhile Blue discussed a lesbian she had met as ‘that very sort of aggressive (mm) dykey, political, kind of y’know’ (P20, Blue).

\(^{133}\) I did not specifically ask the women which identity labels that they had chosen to use in the past, and so was unable to report this in the demographics. However, some of the women made reference to the subject during interviews.

\(^{134}\) *Dykes to Watch Out For* is a cartoon strip by artist Alyson Bechdel (http://dykestowatchoutfor.com).
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Only a small number of the women discussed ‘lesbians with attitude’, perhaps because they did not wish to be ‘offensive’ about lesbians. It may have been in order dissipate their discomfort in engaging with a ‘risky’ topic, that Alex (above), and Adele and Elizabeth (below), used laughter in their talk. When I asked Adele how she would spot a lesbian she told me: ‘One of the big things is the attitude (right). Really. Just ‘don’t mess with me’ kind of attitude [laughs] (right). And that’s before I’ve spotted the short hair’ (P18, Adele).

Photograph P18: Adele

Elizabeth’s account mentioned stereotypes, possibly to avoid taking ownership of these ideas. However, she used to identify as a lesbian, thus had been an insider, hence her use of the term ‘stereotype’ may be a genuine reflection of her belief in their inaccuracy:
Chapter Seven: “I can’t build up an image in my head of bisexuality”:
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‘Okay, you have to look really miserable for a start (laughter) [...] you’ve gotta have this atmosphere of “don’t come anywhere near me or I’m gonna beat you up”. This is stereotypical cos, none of my friends are like this at all (mm), but y’know if I saw someone in the street and I was to go “oh they’re gay” these are the reasons why. So yeah, normally short hair, piercings, [...] tend to be overweight (laughter) [...] it’s more in the facial features I would say and the attitude (really) that tells me, my radar comes out, yeah, than so much for the clothing, though if someone walked in like a skirt and top, I’d probably think maybe not (mm), they wouldn’t instantly go off. But I find there is an attitude to people, and people that look completely straight, I can tend to tell whether they’re gay or not just by how they are, I can’t tell from a picture but I can tell from talking to somebody’ (P7, Elizabeth).

For Elizabeth, appearance plays a part in recognising women’s sexuality, but appearance alone is not enough. Dress and appearance might clue her in (or out) of reading sexual identity from the body, but attitude is the primary signal, and therefore she would not be able to ‘tell from a picture’. This indicates that lesbian looks have to be ‘in action’, carried upon and within the (larger) lesbian body before it can become truly authentic and recognisable.

Other participants recognised a ‘lesbian walk’ (Esterberg, 1996a; Johnson et al., 2007), through which an embodied lesbian identity is ‘carried’ and made visible. Marie stated that she knew that a particular woman was a lesbian, because she had ‘made it very obvious, even in the way she’d stand, and the way she walked, so it was like, almost a swagger (mm) which I found quite common with a lot of the lesbians I used to know’ (P13, Marie). Emily echoed Marie’s words when she described a period of her life when she had engaged in polyamory (and had a male and a female partner), and was going out on the scene:

‘I wanted the other side of me to be far butcher, and y’know, confident and have that sort of swagger and confidence that lesbians have, and I was only poorly imitating (laughs) [...] it’s the, the lesbian being butch walk, it’s the like confident, butch lesbian and that’s how they walk and do their swagger’ (P3, Emily).

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The term ‘swagger’ has been identified as a powerful and confident assertion of lesbian identity, and a way in which lesbians recognise each other (Esterberg, 1996a). The term has also been associated with masculinity (Johnson et al., 2007), hence there are strong links between lesbian bodies and masculinity, just as there were with lesbian dress and masculinity. Therefore the women’s understandings mirrored the inversion theories of early sexologists (e.g., Krafft-Ebing, 1886/1997; 1903; Ellis, 1906/2001), highlighting the importance that history has in building the foundations of contemporary understandings.

Emily refers to her attempts to ‘look gay’ as a poor imitation of ‘real’ and ‘authentic’ lesbians, and later in the interview I asked her to elaborate:

‘[W]hen I was really far more orientated towards being with a woman, my appearance did concern me a lot, I put a lot of time into thinking, “how can I look, more ... gay” (mm). And it was never something that I think fully achieved, or had the confidence to y’know ... go that extra mile with, like cutting my hair (mm) I never did it, so I never really escaped what I essentially am which is someone that looks quite feminine I suppose...’ (P3, Emily).

Emily recognised the embodiment of lesbian identity, but believed that for her to look authentically gay would require a committed transformation away from her own ‘essential’ femininity. However, she described her ex-girlfriend rather differently:

‘She looked ridiculously gay (laughs) [...] because she looked ... so butch... [...] I don’t think she could quite see how butch and obviously gay she looked (right). She made comments to me about oh y’know “not everyone knows I’m gay at work”.
And it’s like, well yeah they do, y’know (laughs) of course they do... [...] it wasn’t just that she was creating an image, she was butch, every part of her was butch, she was very, y’know she was properly quite masculine (mm), she wore men’s clothes, she wore men’s underwear (mm), there was no ... sort of ounce of femininity about (right) about the way she walked or carried herself (P3, Emily).

Emily’s understanding is that how we look is a ‘vertical representation’ of our ‘true’ selves (Riley & Cahill, 2005:263), whereby appearance (outer self) is read as an
authentic representation of our identity (inner self). Some of these women understood lesbians to have an ‘essential’ (inner) masculinity, which reflects an embodied (masculine) identity. Further, Emily presents lesbian identity as being rather extreme (for example in her ex-girlfriend was described as ‘ridiculously gay’). Lesbian identity was seen as all encompassing, for example, Elizabeth reflected on when she previously identified as a lesbian. The image she provided was of living and breathing her lesbian identity:

‘I was stauchnly gay and in the scene and doing all the lesbian things [...] being gay was the strong point for everything, for lifestyle choice, for partner, for clothing, for the pubs and whatever, even down to the fact that I drank beer all the time and now I drink red wine (laughter). Seriously, just little things like that (mm). And if I go out on the scene, I feel like I have to have a pint, doesn’t matter that I want a wine, it has to be a pint’ (P7, Elizabeth).

Previous literature has identified that appearance is policed within gay space (e.g., Holliday, 1999; Ciasullo, 2001; Eves, 2004; Levitt & Hiestand, 2005; Clarke & Turner, 2007). However, some of these women highlighted that behavior and lifestyle more widely were also highly socially regulated. Marie and Roxy offered similar accounts of the all-consuming lesbian identity:

I think there’s kind of exterior trappings like … what you drink and whether you smoke … I remember this girl who […] had very set ideas of the cigarettes she smoked and what type of beer she drank, and all this and how that made her y’know, feel gay and (mm hm) was part of her kind of identity as being a gay woman. Which I never really got (laughter) (P13, Marie).

‘[M]y friend Margaret, who is … kind of a dyed-in-the-wool lesbian, she does a lot of things like, she goes to a walking group, and she goes to a book group (mm), and they’re just lesbian, and it’s like, do lesbians walk a particular way? (laughs) (right). Whereas I like groups that are very inclusive (mm), and okay, y’know, respect people’s … (mm) preferences and needs but, maybe it’s not necessary to be a total kind of … I dunno you’re taking yourself out of one closet and putting
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yourself in another closet (mm) I think’ (P8, Roxy).

Roxy’s term ‘dyed in the wool lesbian’ conjures the image of an essential or inner
lesbian identity, so deeply ingrained that it becomes part of the self, the very fibre of
her being. However, she is critical of lesbians moving from one set of norms and
regulations (heterosexual society) to another (lesbian social identity). Similarly, Marie
does not really ‘get it’, hence both of these women distanced themselves from such
lifestyles, therefore distancing their own bisexual identity from lesbian identity.

I move on now to discuss body size, which was understood to be a part of lesbian
identity. Alex referenced lesbian media and its portrayal of (athletic) muscley lesbians
when she said: ‘have you read magazines like Diva (mm, yeah). There’s a ‘dress’ isn’t it
(yeah), the sort of little t-shirts and the big muscles’ (P9, Alex). When talking about the
character Shane from The L-Word Blue said ‘they do sort of create this image actually
(mm) of her being sporty […] But I think that it is a gay thing, it is, y’know the whole
muscles’ (P20, Blue). Similarly Emily’s description of her efforts to ‘look gay’ included
that she wanted to ‘have quite defined arms and things like that’ (P3, Emily).

Muscles were not the only way that the (larger) body could reveal lesbian identity. In
an earlier quotation Elizabeth introduced the notion of the lesbian who ‘tends to be
overweight’. Similarly, Marie described a particular lesbian as ‘this girl I knew who was
very masculine, she was very big and wore men’s trousers and men’s shirts’ (P13,
Marie). Lucy reflected upon her own size when talking about lesbian looks, and tied
her weight into why she wore men’s clothes, which accordingly contributed to her
lesbian look:

‘I mean it’s short hair, it’s men’s clothes, that’s what it was for me (yeah) I was
massive, I was huge, at various points in my life, so there’s elements of that partly
being about weight, and trying to hide weight or, elements of it being about ...
the sexuality element, but, bit of both really’ (P19, Lucy).

In contrast the ‘trendy androgynous’ or femme lesbians was described as ‘skinny’.

Eddy reflected on (her dissatisfaction with) images in lesbian media:
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‘[O]n one level it seems very logical that lesbian magazines are, totally full of very
ordinary images of sleek looking thin ladies, but it does seem like a bit of a shame
(mm) that you couldn’t achieve some kind of variety within that’ (P20, Eddy).

Feminist scholars have discussed how to be large is associated with masculinity and
defies the thin ideal prescribed for women in western society (Brown, 1987; Bell &
McNaughton, 2007; Tischner & Malson, 2008). Therefore the ‘large’ lesbian can be
understood as a form of powerful resistance to (hegemonic) heterosexual mainstream
society, within which women are discouraged from taking up space, because size gives
women presence, visibility, and establishes their right to exist (Brown, 1987; Bell &
McNaughton, 2007). However, it may also lead to further stigmatisation (Bell &
McNaughton, 2007; Tischner & Malson, 2008).

In their discussions of lesbian looks the women created a picture of lesbian identity
being visible both on, and through, the body. They made clear that clothes alone are
not necessarily enough to portray lesbian identity. Rather it is the combination of the
correct wardrobe, the right haircut, and the embodiment of sexuality which creates an
authentic and recognisable lesbian.

Lesbian icons

In this final subtheme I briefly discuss how lesbians were understood to have icons,
who were perceived to be an important influence on lesbian appearance. I do so to
highlight that lesbian appearance has some (albeit minimal) cultural presence,
whereby lesbians may be visible (to each other) in and through mainstream mass
media. However, the same does not apply for bisexual women.

Several of the women mentioned (in passing) notable lesbian novels, films, and
television programmes. Gemma asked me if I had ever seen the television adaptation
of the book Fingersmith (Waters, 2002), the lesbian themed novel set in Victorian
times. She stated that ‘there’s a lot about them dressing up in suits in, on stage and
things like that and that being the beginnings of, sort of lesbian culture and stuff’ (P1,

Although, through her talk it became clear that she meant the television adaptation of
Tipping the Velvet (Waters, 1998).
Gemma). Rose recalled the influence of Diane Keaton as an early lesbian icon in the film *Annie Hall* 1977:

‘I mean she wasn’t a lesbian (mm) but she dressed in waistcoats and little hats and ties and shirts (okay), and everybody adored her (laughs). [...] She was this real kind of “oh my God she’s such a star and she’s so gorgeous and she wears men’s trousers and waistcoats and things” (yeah), so there were a lot of us doing that. And I remember wearing, you know, shirts and waistcoats’ (P11, Rose).

![Photograph P11: Rose](image)

Diane Keaton had influenced how Rose dressed and appeared, and Blue referenced the characters in the 1996 film *Bound*, which entered the discussion when she was talking about a ‘trendy androgynous dyke’ look which she thought:

’sort of happened with *Bound*, and Corky¹³⁶, I think that was a momentous moment [...] [when my friend] said “you’ve got to watch this film, *Bound*” and it was like this amazing rev[elation] [...] I didn’t mix in the gay world, so I didn’t know about their icons and their (mm), you know the whole world of *Bound*, and

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¹³⁶ The two main characters in *Bound* were Violet, who was femme, and Corky who was portrayed as an attractive androgynous butch lesbian with a slim and muscular but feminine body (Ciasullo, 2001)
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Shane, and all of that, that now I couldn’t live without, I’m gonna die when The L-Word finishes’ (P20, Blue).

Blue described the characters in the film Bound as their (lesbian) icons, but related to them nonetheless. Blue was not alone in her awareness of The L-Word. For Emily the programme directly influenced her appearance, and she would ‘copy things that Shane would wear, I bought Shane’s trainers, and I bought Shane’s lip gloss (laughter) [...] partly because I was a bit obsessed with her and I just wanted to be in the club’ (P3, Emily). Another example was apparent when Berni (P5) referred to Alex Parks, the lesbian singer who won the U.K. talent programme Fame Academy in 2003. Through the women’s talk, they made clear that they recognised the existence of lesbians within wider culture. Although they were familiar with visible lesbian icons, this was perhaps in the absence of visible bisexual icons to draw upon. This suggests that bisexual people are in the main, culturally invisible and left with few role models to draw upon (Ochs, 2007; Capulet, 2010).
2. Invisible Bisexuals

Lesbian visual identity was positioned as an integral part of a wider lesbian identity. By contrast, these women were unable to describe a clear bisexual visual identity. This was evident in their discussions of their own sexuality, and their understandings of how others understood bisexuality. In this theme I interpret the women’s talk of invisible bisexual bodies, which reflects an invisible bisexual identity.

"I can’t build up an image in my head of bisexuality": The invisible bisexual body

On the whole the women were unable to describe what a bisexual woman might look like. Bisexuality is so invisible that most of these bisexual women had never considered bisexual appearance, or the possibility of a bisexual look, until they heard about my research.
I asked Amy whether she thought that people would be able to read her sexuality from how she looks:

‘No. That was why I was so fascinated and attracted to your advert (right). Cos I thought, humph, y’know, I’ve got no, I don’t think so, I don’t think I’ve met anybody who’s, it’s always surprised me [...] (reads from Nikki’s information sheet) “What’s it all about? My aim is to establish whether there is a bisexual ‘look’ or visual identity” and I’ve put (mm) I’d be surprised if you find one’ (P12, Amy).

Despite identifying as bisexual, Elizabeth positioned bisexuality as unable to exist because it was swallowed up by the social context of ‘gay’ or ‘straight’ space:

‘I wouldn’t, I’ve never even, til I approached you about this, I’d never even thought about “oh bisexual look” because the way I’ve always done it is “gay going out on the scene, straight going out with David” so (laughs) as opposed to “bisexual”’ (P7, Elizabeth).

In stating that there is no way to look bisexual Elizabeth indicated that bisexual identity entirely disappears as a result of its visual absence. The key story in the data was that there were ways to look lesbian, but no equivalent ways in which to look bisexual:

Nikki: I’d like to ask you really (yes) whether or not you think that there is such a thing as a bisexual look?

Emily: (8 second pause) Ermmm, I think in general it varies more than it does in the lesbian community (hm mm), there’s obviously a greater ... degree ... of difference... but... I think ... there perhaps is in certain ... well ... erm, for me ... I’ve found it helpful to latch onto some sort of les[bian], either lesbian, I don’t know if I’d class it just as bisexual. I think at the times when I’ve wanted to meet women (mm) and be in relationships with women, I’ve tried to cultivate a, perhaps lesbian ... appearance. Or certainly something that will signal me? (hm mm), as being bisexual or lesbian erm... erm (8 second pause) erm...’ (P3, Emily).
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Emily’s reply to my question is dotted with pauses and false starts, reflecting her uncertainty, and indicating that a bisexual look was difficult to identify or talk about. It was a lot harder for the women to pinpoint how a bisexual person might be identified through their appearance, and as Emily did, many of the women resorted to talking about lesbian appearance in their answers. It was interesting to note that when the women were not being asked directly about a lesbian’s appearance, they were far more willing to acknowledge the existence of a lesbian look. I asked Gemma if she thought that there was a bi look:

‘No (2 second pause) Not really. Although I’m not 100% sure about that but I... slightly struggle with the concept of a bi look erm, because I don’t know whether that means... a lesbian look, as in a clichéd “I, don’t want to, to look... attractive to men” [...] as far as I can see, if you’re bisexual you’re attracted to both sexes (mm hm) so I don’t really... I s’pose I can’t really understand a sort of reason for wanting to look one particular way or the other because as you’re attracted to both sexes it’s surely about the person and not the sex (mm hm) therefore, erm... (3 second pause) maybe there’s subtle things that happen, in different relationships, in different partnerships, I’m sure there probably are (mm) but as far as saying that you could identify someone walking down the street (mm) as looking bisexual as opposed to lesbian (mm), I don’t think so’ (P1, Gemma).

Like Emily, Gemma struggled to answer my question, indicated by her pauses and various shifts of direction. She was also unsure about what function a bisexual look would serve, and interpreted lesbian appearance as a matter of sexual signalling to attract an appropriate partner (Krakauer & Rose, 2002; Rothblum, 2002; Luzzatto & Gvion, 2004; Winn & Nutt, 2001; Levitt & Hiestrand, 2005). Roxy made it abundantly clear that she had no visual image of bisexuality, and attributed this to wider bisexual invisibility, and to her lack of bisexual friends:

‘I don’t know many people who are bisexual so... (mm), I can’t build up a, uh, an image in my head (mm) of bisexuality (mm). Erm, I know lots of little old ladies so I have a little old lady picture (yeah). I know lots of feisty old ladies, I have a feisty
old lady picture (yeah), erm, but I don’t, you know, there’s very very few people
who are out there as bisexual y’know’ (P8 Roxy).

Not knowing other bisexual people has implications in terms of feeling isolated and
lacking social or cultural support (e.g., Rivers, 1997; Crowley, Harré & Lunt, 2007;
Cashore & Tuason, 2009). The women were all in agreement that bisexual women are
not recognisable. Blue stated ‘[y]ou don’t look at somebody and think they might be
bi, do you, no (no) you think they might be gay’ (P20, Blue), demonstrating that
monosexist versions of sexual identity (e.g. Hemmings, 2002; Clarke & Peel, 2007b) are
all that exist to draw appearance norms from. Lucy said, ‘I mean there is certainly a
lesbian look, I don’t know if there’s a bisexual look really’ (P19 Lucy). When I asked
Adele and if she felt there was a way to communicate her sexuality through her
appearance she said ‘it’s ... pretty much impossible (mm) I think so, yeah it’s not as
clear cut as the different lesbian looks that are out there’ (P18, Adele).

That these women struggled to talk about bisexual looks, even when asked directly,
indicates that a bisexual look does not exist (and therefore cannot be talked about).
Therefore, their strategy of speaking of lesbian looks when asked about bisexual looks
reinforces that a lesbian look does exist (and can be talked about). This is exemplified
in both Eddy and Elizabeth’s responses to my asking if they had a sense of ‘bidar’ and
whether they might be able to ‘spot’ other bisexual people:

‘I think I always forget that people might be bi (laughs) erm, erm I dunno, erm,
probably not, I’m, I’m a bit clueless (okay, okay). And I don’t tend to extrapolate, I
do still think “oh that person, they look a bit like a lesbian”. And then I might
come back from that and think “ooh they might be bisexual” but, it’s not a sort of
instinctive “a ha! You have that look”’ (P15, Eddy).

‘I mean I don’t think people think about it, I mean I certainly wouldn’t think about
it, I would ide[n]tify, I would look at people and say “oh they’re straight” or
“they’re gay” but I never would have thought, I wouldn’t instantly say “they’re
bisexual”’ (P7, Elizabeth).

These women acknowledged then, that they do evaluate other women’s sexuality
based on their appearance (Esterberg, 1996a; Wollery, 2007). That they drew
conclusions about sexuality in this way represents the significance of visual identity in
marking out sexuality. However, bisexuality was understood as invisible,
unrecognisable either on or through the body. Lucy believed she had a sense of
‘gaydar’ which would allow her to spot lesbians, but she was less certain that she
could spot other bisexual people:

‘I have my suspicions yeah, and then obviously you engineer conversations
around various things and, maybe that’s not completely obvious, but to me that
is, to get some clarification for what might be a suspicion sort of thing’ (P19,
Lucy).

This was not the only time in the interview that Lucy referenced conversation as a
necessary element of establishing whether someone was bisexual. I asked her if she
was able to express her bisexuality through her appearance, and she replied: ‘I think
more than anything it’ll come up in how I talk or what I talk about more likely than
through my image’ (P19, Lucy). Likewise, Sandy said ‘I don’t think bisexuals are easy to
spot (mm) erm, I think when you talk to someone you get a vague idea’ (P10, Sandy).
Similarly, Matilda explained that people won’t know that she is bisexual from her
appearance alone:

Nikki: And do you think other people would read you as bisexual or have you ever
had anyone ... work out that you’re bisexual from your appearance?

Matilda: I don’t know about from my appearance, erm ... and as I say, quite a few
people that I’ve told have said “well yeah obviously” (laughter). I think that’s
possibly, that’s probably because, you know, by that stage, you know, when I,
when I’ve talked to them about it, they know me quite well, and so they know my
personality as well (mm) I don’t know about directly from my appearance (P17,
Matilda).
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Eddy elaborated further on her earlier comments:

‘If you want to be visible as a bisexual it’s usually a verbal thing, you have to do
the declaration of coming out, rather than the more subtle communications [...]’
I’m extraordinarily resistant to noticing (laughs) that other people are bi. [...] and
it’s not until somebody actually like hits me round the head with a large stick that
I realise that people are bi ... I don’t know if you’d call that invisible or just
cluelessness’ (P15, Eddy).

Eddy was aware that appearance can function as a way to ‘come out’ and express
sexuality to others (e.g., Lewis & Rolley, 1997; Winn & Nutt, 2001; Krakauer & Rose,
2002). However, there was no distinct bisexual visual language available to the
bisexual women to communicate through. Unlike Eddy, I interpret their lack of
recognising others not as ‘cluelessness’ but as a reflection of their lack of visual
identity, which in turn makes them literally invisible.

“Your partner does kinda get used as this symbol of your sexuality”: The invisibility
of bisexuality in and through relationships

The literal invisibility of bisexuality was not the only way in which bisexuality was
understood to be invisible. Some of the participants expressed their belief that others
would assess their sexual identity based on the sex/gender of their partner (e.g.,
Barker & Yockney, 2004). They were aware that by talking about or by being seen with
a partner, they were either assumed by others to be heterosexual, or to be ‘coming
out’ as a lesbian:

‘I don’t go round saying “hello my name’s Betty, I’m bisexual”. You just don’t do
that so, the natural way to come out is to say, “oh I’ve got a partner, she’s’ (mm)
so and so” (yep). And people do assume that you’re lesbian, not everybody but
most people do assume so, then you have, it’s almost like a second coming out
(mm) to say “oh no, actually, actually, I’m bi (mm) and not lesbian” [...] I’m quite a
private person anyway, so in most circumstances I don’t clarify (mm), I tend to
wait until I get to know people better and build up a friendship and wait til the,
you’re on the, you’re not necessarily on the topic but that, where it (mm) feels

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like a more natural point (yeah) to say “actually”, if they say something like ... I
don’t know, “do you have other lesbian friends?” or something, “actually I’m not
a lesbian”, y’know, (yeah) “I’m bisexual” but, yeah I think it’s, there’s a definite
issue about a kind of second coming out’ (P2, Betty).

Betty may not expect to be read as bisexual, but it is important to her that people are
aware of her sexuality. Lesbians (and be they aware of it or not, heterosexual women)
often convey their sexuality by ‘playing the pronoun game’ when mentioning their
partner, but bisexual women could not ‘out’ themselves simply by referring to a
partner. Claire was another participant who discussed this topic:

‘[B]ecause of having had a male primary partner for so long and for the first five
years of that relationship which is an eleven year relationship nearly, we were
monogamous and (right) so y’know to all outward appearances I was this straight
person living with a man ... and I found that really difficult, I felt like I was
disappearing’ (P14, Claire).

Photograph P14: Claire
Claire later discussed how she felt that now she had a male and a female partner, she was able to be more expressive of her bisexuality, and use her relationships in order to come out: ‘I just talk about my girlfriend (yeah) or whatever, and my boyfriend and it is weird cos your partner does kinda get used as this symbol of your sexuality (mm) but it does end up being that way’ (P14, Claire). However, even in Claire’s situation, unless she appeared with, or spoke about, both partners simultaneously, she still had to come out as bisexual if she wished to be recognised as such. Similarly, Ruth indicated that polyamory doesn’t always automatically convey bisexuality:

‘I just think it’s so hard to read anyone as bi that ... that most people would read me as gay if I was on my own or with my girlfriend (mm) and, “straight but (whispers) probably secretly a lesbian” if I was with my boyfriend (right, right). Or even just straight if I was with my boyfriend y’know, I (4 second pause) so many people have assumed that I was straight because I mentioned men to them (mm, mm), but I just find it really difficult to guess what people will think’ (P16, Ruth).
The women’s stories of their relationships often positioned bisexuality as lacking tangibility. Bisexuality was understood to be invisible, hidden behind the masks of their seemingly heterosexual or lesbian relationships. However, the women’s talk did not mirror the findings of Taub (1999), which had indicated that bisexual women managed their appearance according to the gender of their partner. Although the women were directly asked about whether their partner influenced how they dressed and appeared, there was no indication in the data that this was applicable for them. This may suggest that while bisexuality is often conceptualised as a fluid identity, bisexual women nonetheless have a concrete sense of self. Accordingly, these bisexual women’s appearance was not necessarily dictated by, or changeable according to, the women’s current relationship statuses.

_Invisible bisexual community_

In this subtheme I use quotations from the twelve women who had little or no involvement with bisexual community. These women’s understanding of their lack of look, and lack of visibility, also extended to their feeling that there was a lack of bisexual community. As outlined in Chapter Five, there is a bisexual community in the U.K., but many participants were unaware of this, or of the bisexual flag and bisexual colours (see Chapter Two).

I directly asked ‘are you aware of the bisexual colours and the bisexual flag?’, and their responses overwhelmingly indicated that they were not. Gemma said ‘No, are there bi colours?’ (P1, Gemma). Amy simply said ‘No’ (P12, Amy), and Millie ‘Uh, no’ (P4, Millie). Elizabeth responded:

‘Bi colours? […] My God my eyes have been opened […] I didn’t know anything about that at all I mean, see that’s a very well kcpt secret, how are people meant to know, y’know, what I mean (mm), I’d see one and I wouldn’t know’ (P7, Elizabeth).

The rainbow flag is a well established symbol of lesbians and gay men. Earlier in this theme I evidenced the way that the women talked about lesbian appearance when asked about _bisexual_ appearance, and a similar strategy was employed here. Sandy
replied: ‘No not at all. Erm, is the gay flag a rainbow?’ (P10, Sandy) and Betty said:

Betty: No (laughs) [...] I was at the Uni Student’s Union the other day (mm) at a sexualities fair there [...] there was a couple of stalls selling sort of LGB merchandise (mm) there was loads of rainbow flags, rainbow everything (yeah). [...] There may well have been stuff in the bi colours (yeah) but probably not (yeah), that’s, I mean all the rainbow stuff that’s (mm) is what I instantly think of (P2, Betty).

A similar picture emerged regarding bisexual community. I asked Sandy whether she was aware of Bifest and Bicon, but she ‘had no idea about any of this’ (P10, Sandy), and Berni commented: ’I don’t really know of any bi community as such’ (P5, Berni). Lucy theorised an explicit link between the lack of visible bisexual look and lack of a visible bisexual community:

‘I think ... there is quite a lack of, maybe the two go hand in hand, the fact that there’s not many social networks in bisexual terms (mm), means there’s not any particular image, the fact that there’s no particular image means that there’s not any particular social network’ (P19, Lucy).

The invisibility of bisexual community was sometimes contrasted with the visibility of a lesbian and gay scene:

Nikki: [H]ave you ever been part of any kind of bisexual community or group?

Lucy: Erm ... no, well no not particularly. But within the LG community (mm), within the walking group anyway, I would be out as bisexual and people would know, and there would be an element of our own sort of group of bisexuals within that’ (P19, Lucy).

However, Lucy found it problematic that she had to remind others of her bisexuality within this wider LGBT space in order for its existence to be acknowledged:

‘I think I came across as quite lesbian in the first place and so then if I’d had certain relations with a man, and I would talk about it there’d be this kind of “oh
really” and then still, every now and again, there’s “oh yeah, I forget that about you”. That sort of like “you’re a bit different” and y’know, it gets tiring sometimes that you’re a bit different from everybody then (mm) and there’s not that much of a bisexual network in as much as there is a gay network (mm) y’know?” (P19, Lucy).

Lucy’s talk mirrors Ruth’s narrative of reminding her partner of her bisexuality in her relationship, where unless others were continually reminded about the existence of the women’s bisexuality, then it became forgotten. This constant need to remind others represents an ongoing (and tiring) attempt to bring bisexuality to the fore, and make its presence known in a monosexist world (e.g., Namaste, 1996b; Clarke & Peel, 2007b). Further, Lucy highlighted that the group she attended includes bisexual in its name:

Nikki: So is the walking group a gay walking group?

Lucy: Yeah it’s Brighton Lesbian and Gay Walkers, it’s Brighton Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Walkers, but, we don’t, you’d have to have massive t-shirts to get that on so (laughter) Brighton L and G Walkers’ (P19 Lucy).

Bisexuality becomes visibilised through its inclusion, but invisibilised through the group’s clothing, when t-shirts were made, and the ‘B’ (and ‘T’) omitted. Lucy dismissed this as a practical issue of space, and seemed unconcerned. However, she then reveals that the t-shirts contain the abbreviation of the group name, where a ‘B’ (and ‘T’) would surely take up little room. It is possible that Lucy is so used to the dismissal of bisexuality that she doesn’t perceive this as an issue. However, her discussion highlights that the walking group is a place that she feels she can belong, and perhaps her sense of having a community leads to her overlooking (or excusing) the lack of visible inclusion of ‘the B word’. This echoes the lack of inclusivity of the term LGBT, and the way in inclusion of the B word does not guarantee meaningful inclusion for bisexual people (e.g., Clarke & Rúdolfsdóttir, 2005; Clarke & Peel, 2007a; 2007b).

The fundamental story in the data was of bisexual women as invisible in their bodies,
in their identities, and in some ways, in communities. Individual and social visibility relate to domination and oppression, subjectification and objectification. To be visible allows recognition (Brighenti, 2007). Those who are visible are often dominant, in part because they are recognised, and therefore validated. In turn, those who are invisible are not seen and therefore denied recognition, and oppressed (Brighenti, 2007). In this sense ‘if silence equals death, invisibility is nonexistence’ (Walker, 2001:1), because what is not seen is instead denied (Freitas, Kaiser & Hammidi, 1996).

Visibility can be affirming and validating, and potentially provides the groundwork for political change (Gamson, 1995; 1998; Walker, 2001). Activists have argued that visibility allows literal spaces (e.g., communities) and experiential spaces (e.g., being able to recognise others ‘like us’, or hearing about ‘ourselves’ in mainstream mass media) to develop and expand. Critically, the creation of ‘space’ allows room for people to position themselves, hence a subjective, rather than an objective, identity can be expressed, acknowledged and validated (Freitas et al., 1996). The visibilising process becomes self perpetuating. As more people become visible, the more they can become represented, the more the group is represented, the more individuals are willing to become visible (Freitas et al., 2007). Invisibility is debilitating, because it allows those who are ‘othered’ to be kept ‘in their place’ as other. Representation is powerful (Gamson, 1998; Frith & Gieeson, 2003), because it allows the possibility of challenging misunderstandings and misrepresentations.

However, it is worth noting that visibility can be a precarious position which requires strategic balancing. To become ‘supra-visible’ (Brighenti, 2007:330), can be to risk the image becoming ‘too strong’, which in turn can lead to accusations of taking up ‘too much space’, which threatens social constraints and can result in ‘moral panic’ (Brighenti, 2007:330). An example of this is the butch lesbian, whose appearance so apparent it marks her out as different (Walker, 2001), or the ‘large woman’ who defies the thin ideal (Brown, 1987). Subsequently, the result is that those who are ‘inappropriately visible’ draw too much attention to themselves and are policed, controlled, and constrained (e.g., Brighenti, 2007). Therefore there are risks, and rather than visibility being ‘a direct route to liberation’ instead ‘it can easily lead
elsewhere’ (Gamson, 1998:12). In relation to non-heterosexual identities, being visible can lead to becoming a target of discrimination, by refusing ‘the anonymity of the closet’ and standing ‘on the front lines of the margins’ (Walker, 2001:2). As discussed in Chapter One, visual identity can have benefits, but may also be disadvantageous.
3. (In)Distinctly bisexual

Despite the overwhelming sense that there was no visible bisexual look, in places the women provided complex and contradictory narratives around their sexuality and appearance. There were moments in the data where it seemed that the women were trying to convey that there was a link between bisexuality and appearance, even though there was no recognisable ‘look’. The quotations which I present in this theme represent the women attempting to elucidate a visual identity, and searching for ways in which bisexuality could become recognised through dress and appearance.

*Fixidity, Fluidity and Freedom II*

In this theme I evidence how some of the women discussed their bisexual appearance in ways which mirrored their discussions of bisexual identity. One narrative that the women engaged with mirrored that of a ‘third identity position’ (as discussed in Chapter Six). The bisexual ‘look in between’ that the women created through their talk, relied on the binaries of ‘lesbian look’, and the acknowledgement of (or creation of an imaginary) ‘heterosexual look’. Therefore, just as bisexuality was a third identity position, which required homosexual and heterosexual identity to be upheld in order to exist, so the women created a third visual identity, which required heterosexual and homosexual appearance to exist. Through the creation of this space, they could situate a bisexual look within it, which allowed them to enunciate their appearance as related to their identity. However, they did not necessarily believe that this third visual identity culminated in any distinctly bisexual look recognisable to others - just as the third bisexual identity position has often not been recognisable to others.

In the *Visible Lesbians* theme I used the women’s accounts to show how they understood lesbian appearance to be associated with masculinity. They also positioned normative heterosexual appearance as being the direct opposite of this, hence heterosexuality was often associated with (an exaggerated version of) femininity. I use Gemma’s narrative to demonstrate how she construed a bisexual look by rejecting (excessive) masculinity or (an exaggerated) femininity. She is talking here
about the first time that she met her bisexual woman partner on a blind date. I had
asked if she had any expectations of how her partner might look before she met her:

‘I would have been quite intimidated if y’know if somebody really ... butch had
turned up [...] I s’pose in my head ... I wanted to try a relationship with a woman
(mm) so y’know, why play down womanly attributes [...] I’ve never quite
understood the sort of lesbian look because I’ve always thought, why try and ...
defeminise’ (P1, Gemma).

Gemma positions butch as unnatural through the term ‘defeminisation’, which implies
that a ‘natural’ state of femininity has been rejected by the butch woman. In doing so
Gemma positions butch as (excessively) masculine, and disassociates bisexuality from
such extremity. She then expressed a similar aversion to excessive femininity:

‘[B]ut saying that if she’d turned up in high heels and a little skirt and her cleavage
hanging out I would have been equally as like “whoagh” y’know (yep). It’s not
that I want a male kind of cliché of feminine beauty it was just something, she
was natural, she was gentle, she was curvy (mm) she was y’know, she wasn’t
covered in make-up and y’know (mm) tottering on high heels’ (P1, Gemma).

Gemma has articulated an ‘overly feminine’ (heterosexual) woman who, like the butch
lesbian, takes her appearance to extremes. She will reveal ‘too much’ of her body and
‘over do’ femininity through high heels, short skirts, and cleavage. The association with
heterosexuality, and heteronormativity, is made particularly clear through her
surmising that this is a male cliché of beauty, understood as a performance to draw
the male gaze, which is deemed problematic in its objectification of women (e.g.,
Tseelon, 1995; Riley & Cahill, 2005).

Through describing and rejecting the overly masculine lesbian and the overly feminine
heterosexual, Gemma has carved a space where the bisexual woman can belong:

‘[F]or me it was kind of not being one way or the other, it wasn’t being overly
feminine, y’know to the point that you’re just kind of “right, look at my boobs”
(mm) and not sort of, underly feminine as like “I’m never going to wear a skirt”
Gemma cleverly creates and uses this space to position bisexuality as the appropriate and 'natural' way to appear. Bisexuality is a balance, 'somewhere in the middle' of these two extremes. Gemma effectively created a continuum of appearance, from (excessive, lesbian) masculinity to (excessive, heterosexual) femininity, where (an appropriately balanced) bisexuality is located in the middle. This is strongly evocative of Kinsey's continuum of sexual identity (Kinsey, Pomeroy & Martin, 1948; Kinsey, Pomeroy, Martin & Gebhard, 1953). She was not alone in this type of strategy:

'I was never girly girl (yeah). [...] I was always very out there with my sexuality [...] when I was younger (mm) but it was never in a girly girly way, you wouldn’t see me walking down with like y’know, kind of short skirts (mm) and stilettos, no I just couldn’t do it' (P20, Blue).

Once again the ‘girly-girly’ is presented as excessive. In advocating that she ‘just couldn’t do it’, Blue indicates that her outer appearance has to be an authentic (vertical) representation of her inner self (Riley & Cahill, 2005). In this sense she sees a girly look as inauthentic for her as a bisexual woman. Blue’s narrative made clear that because she is neither straight nor gay, and she does not wish to appear or be seen as either:

Nikki: Why’s it important do you think? Why do we care about how we’re appearing to the world?

Blue: Because I’m not straight! Because I’m not straight, and I don’t want the whole world to see me as straight because I’m not (mm). Y’know, so somehow or other, but then I’m not gay either, so I can’t do that complete, I wouldn’t wanna do that (P20, Blue).

Blue sees her bisexuality as existing in its own right, distinct from lesbian sexuality or heterosexuality, and wishes to communicate this authentic sexuality in her dress and appearance (e.g., Riley & Cahill, 2005; Clarke & Spence, 2010).
Blue believed that others may be able to read her appearance based on a mixture of her rejection of ‘girly’ and her being ‘very sporty and I think that one of the ways that I’ve expressed my, y’know, I am influenced by the lesbian icons’ (P20, Blue). This led to her concluding that if other people were clued in enough they might be able to read her bisexuality. ‘And if people knew me, and thought about it, they would see that. [...] Clues if you’re looking for them’ (P20, Blue). Other participants also discussed what equated to a ‘look in between’. Millie discussed her appearance:

‘I worry that I don’t look very feminine sometimes [...] I do definitely consider it and although I kind of, don’t tend to wear kind of frilly things or skirts, I tend to kind of feminise my look with kind of accessories and pretty shoes and (mm) and bags and stuff. I think I like to combine looking a bit, quite sort of masculine and quite, I don’t really know what the look would be really, I s’pose quite utilitarian, with the kind of quite pretty look (mm) which I s’pose is, is possibly an interesting parallel to my biness’ (P4, Millie).

Millie’s talk suggests that her appearance is important to her (she worries about it and considers it). Neither the ‘utilitarian’ (masculine) look nor the ‘pretty’ (feminine) look is considered by her to be ‘natural’, and instead her balancing of the two is an active construction. Her ‘bisexual look’ is a blend of heterosexuality and lesbianism, rather than an entity in and of itself. Sandy also refers to (non)excess and balance:

‘I guess if you’re bi you don’t want to alienate anyone (mm) and that’s why, I kind of try my best to, stay middle ground y’know, I have long hair and I wouldn’t crop it all off [...] I do wear make-up but I don’t wear too much (mm). And I don’t wear skirts but then, I don’t wear overly baggy clothes or anything (mm). I just try to stay middle ground’ (P10, Sandy).

Sandy rejects the excess of ‘too much’ make-up (rejection of heterosexual looks) and ‘overly’ baggy clothes (rejection of lesbian looks) and specifically talks about a middle ground, where bisexuality fits. She also recognises the function that appearance can serve to communicate sexuality to others.
Another ‘use’ of visual identity is self expression, and I asked Ruth if she expressed her bisexuality through her appearance. She replied that ‘I think I play with people’s assumptions about what lesbians wear and what straight women wear’ (P16, Ruth), and positioned her appearance as a blend of straight and gay, which reflects understanding of bisexuality as a fluid mixing of homosexuality and heterosexuality (Lingel, 2009):

‘I’ve talked about how I used to kind of think that I had to be either all femme, or all butch (mm, mm) and suits and no make-up or (mm) or all make-up and dresses and stuff. [...] I s’pose this kind of illustrates where I’m more willing to cross over (right yeah) now and to mix stuff. So I was wearing like a fairly masculine jacket but with my bra poking out of the top and it was quite a girly bra [...] not feeling that I have to be one or the other’ (P16, Ruth).

Similarly, Elizabeth drew on both fixed and fluid understandings of (visual) identity, and thought that it might be possible to see bisexuality in a ‘mish mash’ of masculine and feminine, gay and straight:

‘you’re gonna get some women that, they look completely straight, you’ve got your little heels and your short skirts (mm) and your, y’know, handbag and massive earrings and tottering out, they’re probably not gonna be gay [...] then you’re gonna get your huge butch dykes with the carpets under their arms (mm) attitudes, and they’re probably not gonna be straight, so you’ve got your two extremes. And I think then there’s that look in the middle, where ... there’s a little bit of something there, from either side, they’re the ones that are gonna be bisexual [...] if there is a look it’s that look in between isn’t it [...] it’s probably in that mish mash of ... not going extreme ...’ (P7 Elizabeth).

Notions of excess and extremity clearly and consistently ran through the women’s narratives. Here Elizabeth is talking about a friend who is bisexual, who she believes encompasses a bisexual look, revealing her understanding that appearance can be key in identifying other’s sexuality:
I always think “oh she’s got the bisexual look” (mm) because she always wears make-up [...] but she never looks straight. When I first met her I knew she was gay, or maybe I knew she was bisexual (laughs) [...] she just wears clothes that aren’t the norm, for the straight community, but not looking lesbian at the same time’ (P7 Elizabeth).

The balancing of ‘lesbian’ and ‘heterosexual’ looks was far from clear cut or easily identifiable. The women struggled to identify exactly how to ‘look bisexual’ but nonetheless it was clear that it was something that they grappled with. However, some women actively rejected this ‘look in between’ for being over simplistic:

‘I think some people do expect you to be a little bit between a boy and a girl don’t they? (Right). If you’re bi, there’s just (mm) a hint of that in the kind of, y’know if you read magazines (mm), Diva and stuff like that [...] there’s just this sort of like, almost like you’re between straight and gay so thus you must be between a boy and a girl [...] you’ve got to be soft with a hard edge so you might be flowery but with piercings’ (P8 Roxy).

Nikki: So of those two looks, of the dress over jeans and (mm) the dress on its own (mm), is there one of those two that you would say that was more of a bi look?

Claire: Well I suppose if we’re just gonna do the whole binary thing (Nikki laughs) then you’d have to say the dress and the trousers because you’ve got this flowery dress and then trousers so it’s like kind of a girl-boy thing but I think that’s too crude’ (P14, Claire).

The women who had drawn on more fluid and queer theories of bisexuality as holding the potential to break down identity categories, also spoke of their appearance in similar ways, as free of constraints:

‘Even though in some ways it’s a loss that there isn’t any obvious community and obvious look (mm), at the same time it’s very liberating (mm). Because you don’t feel you have to conform to someone’s idea (mm) of how you’re supposed to be
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Chapter Seven: “I can’t build up an image in my head of bisexuality”:
Bisexual women’s (lack of) visual identities

[...] I think straight girls have to conform an awful lot, and I think gay girls have to conform an awful lot but if you’re bi then you’ve kind of got a freedom of options (mm), and so you can kind of, modify the way you look more for yourself and how you want to attract someone rather than the idea of how you’re supposed to attract someone’ (P13, Marie).

Marie conceptualises appearance as a matter sexual signalling (see above), and vertical representation (Riley & Cahill, 2005). Her sense of the freedom of bisexuality means that she is free to express an authentic version of herself in how she dresses and appears. Bisexual appearance is not restrained by the dictates of more fixed and rigid identity categories. Roxy considered that her bisexuality allowed her the ‘freedom to sort of flirt (mm) and just have fun with it [her identity]’ (P8, Roxy). Rose also linked her appearance with her identity and discussed how bisexuality offered her particular fluidity and freedom:

‘I think it [bisexual appearance] is so much harder to pin down (laughs). But in a way that’s how it should be isn’t it, because we are harder to pin down (mm), we are not gonna say “I’m this or I’m that” (mm). For me the statement of being bisexual is not just about sexuality. It is a statement about, I’m not gonna fix myself into a rigid identity just because it makes somebody else feel comfortable (mm). I am keeping my options open as a human being (mm) so ... I’m gonna keep my options open in terms of my appearance as well (mm) y’know if I wanna wear one thing one day and another thing another day, that’s what I’m gonna do (yeah). I’m gonna go with what I like and am attracted to and feel comfortable in’ (P11, Rose).

In summary, some of the women created a ‘scale of appearance’, with the masculine ‘butch’ lesbian at one end of the scale, and the feminine ‘girly’ heterosexual at the other. Alternatively, some blended heterosexual and homosexual looks to create a fluid bisexual visual identity. However, these understandings are underpinned by binary understandings of gender and sexuality. While their dress may have allowed them a form of sometimes empowering self expression, it did not allow them to
communicate their bisexuality to others, because there was no recognisable or distinct visual identity for bisexual women.

**“Outside mainstream norms”: Looking bisexual within bisexual communities**

All the quotations in this theme were from women involved in bisexual community, who when initially asked were unable to identify a bisexual look. However, later in the interviews, they made reference to how bisexual women might look within bisexual community. This echoes the literature on lesbian appearance which suggested that appearance norms are often located within community space (Rothblum, 1994a; Luzzatto & Gvion, 2004).

In the main the look they identified was ‘Goth’\(^\text{138}\). Alex said: ‘There’s a sort of academic, under thirty, politically aware (mm), possibly Goth’ (P9, Alex). Claire agreed when she commented ‘if you asked me like what I think would be a very visible look, I would say Goth on the bisexual scene is a big look’ (P14, Claire). Ruth echoed this when I asked her if she had noticed any distinctive looks at Bicon, to which she responded: ‘Oh yeah. I mean ... there were loads of people there who I would broadly classify as Goth’ (P16, Ruth). Adele concurred:

Nikki: Have you noticed at, say Bicon and BiFest, that there is a way or there is a ‘look’, particularly amongst bi people?

Adele: Yeah I was thinking about this the other day (mm) and my first thought was “no”! (laughter). But then I thought a bit more and especially in the evening when people dress up (mm), it can get very Gothy (yeah) [...] So there’s a lot of corsets and a lot of (mm), sort of, ‘striking’ looks. [...] I think it’s very, very varied, but yeah the one that I’ve seen the most has been a Goth (mm) sort of look (P18, Adele).

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\(^{138}\)‘Goth’ has been described as a subcultural community, which emerged in the late 1980s, centred around particular rock music and fashion, involving dyed black hair and ‘predominantly black clothing, offset by heavy jewellery’ (Widdicombe & Wooffitt, 1995:14). My experience of bisexual space is that Goth looks are particularly popular for women, who appeared to embrace femininity but in a bold and powerful way through a combination of striking clothing (such as corsets) and bold colours (e.g., bright red, electric blue) combined with black.
These women’s narratives presented the possibility that although bisexual women may not have their own distinct visual identity, those who are involved in the bisexual community may dress in a ‘Gothy’ style. However, I argue that this ‘Goth potential’ does not make bisexuality any more visible. Instead, bisexuality ultimately remains hidden and invisible even within bisexual space.

First, although a number of women identified a Goth look, it was clear that it was not always strikingly apparent, evidenced in Alex’s choice of the word ‘possibly’, and Adele’s initial response was that there was no distinctive look. A Goth bisexual look is only ‘possible’ and has to be searched for, rather than being conspicuously noticeable.

Second, bisexuality does not become visibilised through a Goth look, because it does not belong exclusively to bisexual women, and not all bisexual women choose to subscribe to it. In the women’s talk it is other bisexual women who manage their appearance to fit with a Goth aesthetic. Although looks can change, there was not consistent evidence of a strong Goth looks among the women I interviewed either during the interview, or in the photographs they showed me.

Third, the ‘Goth potential’ is limited, in that it is not the only look that is available. An array of looks can be seen in bisexual space, hence the women I spoke to varied in their style and they expected that other bisexual women would too. The following quotations exemplify that other looks were also associated with bisexual identity/space.

Claire had already identified that ‘corsets are a big look and [dyed] red hair is a big look’ (P14, Claire), and I asked her whether she could read other people as bisexual:

‘I think I sometimes do. And I think that I also successfully read people as alternative (a ha) and I think that a lot of what bi people do [...] is that they, they look a bit alternative, so if someone’s got a nose ring, or someone’s got dyed hair (yep), or whatever, or multiple piercings or tattoos or ... something interesting in the, that reads a bit alternative about the way they look’ (P14, Claire).
Ruth also associated bisexual identity with other ‘alternative’ styles of dress: ‘I’d be more likely to assume that people who look like Goths, or skaters, or emos⁴³⁹, or the kind of ... hippy indie rock end of the young people’s cultural spectrum. I’d think it was more likely that they would be bi’ (P16, Ruth). Eddy identified yet more potential looks that bisexual women might have including an: ‘androgynous look that you sort of, short haired and with a bit, y’know a bit more butchy than sort of more femme-y-ness’ (P15, Eddy). Blue echoed Eddy when she said: ‘the younger women seemed to be doing that androgynous trendy kind of thing’ (P20, Blue).

Fourth, and finally, a Goth look may be present, but it was only specifically recognised within bisexual space. I asked Claire and Eddy if they expected any look from the bisexual scene to be ‘read’ as bisexual outside of that bisexual space. Claire said: ‘No I don’t think so [...] I think SM and Goth, I would tend to read that as probably more, I think maybe cos it’s more overtly sexual (yes) it would clue me into that’ (P14, Claire). Eddy replied that she was ‘not sure ...’ (P15, Eddy) that any of these ‘looks’ would be ‘read by the outside world as being anything to do with [bisexuality]’ (P15, Eddy).

Neither Eddy nor Claire was confident in reading bisexuality from alternative or Goth looks, hence perhaps these looks hold potential, but no guarantees. Due to the range of looks, their multiple meanings, and the ambiguity around their association with (bi)sexuality, these forms of dress and appearance will not function with any real meaning outside the bi community.

There was ‘something’ in the talk of the community involved women, who expressed that bisexual women might be more likely to look ‘alternative’ in a range of ways. That the looks associated with bisexuality are those linked with existing ‘subversive’ identities perhaps reflects ‘queerer’ understandings of identity. Bisexuality is understood to hold the potential to challenge mainstream understandings of gender and identity. This may link with bisexual people drawing on identities such as ‘hippy’

⁴³⁹Emo is a youth culture which has evolved from Goth, and has been described as ‘a nouveau punk-style’. It has been said to be largely focused on being (Emo)tional and listening to particular styles of (Emo)tional music (see, for example, Baker & Bor, 2008; Lesniak & Lynn, 2008; Haines, Johnson, Carter & Aurora, 2009). The ‘look’ is dyed black hair brushed over the face, androgynous dress (Sands, 2006), with black nail polish, eyeliner, tight jeans, and studded belts http://hubpages.com/hub/Dress-and-Look-like-a-real-Emo).
and ‘Goth, which fall outside the mainstream, and have an associated appearance and visual identity which reflects this. However, this (borrowed) vague visual identity stays firmly rooted within bisexual space. There remains no single look outside of community space that bisexual women can subscribe to which will make their bisexuality apparent to others, even to those ‘in the know’.

“I’d imagine people would think that maybe I was bisexual”

This subtheme focuses on the only one of the women who believed that she looked a little bit bisexual. Marie had no involvement in a bisexual community. Earlier in the interview Marie had spoken about the invisibility of bisexuality: ‘I think because bisexuals are so invisible, in society (mm) no one’s really put any thought into what you’re supposed to do, or supposed to wear’ (P13, Marie). However, her talk around one of her photos (Photograph P13) drew her to conclude that maybe her look was bisexual after all:

Photograph P13: Marie
'I think like if there was a bisexual look that’s probably it. I don’t know like (laughs) kind of quite feminine, but quite sort of alternative and (yeah) a bit fashionable but a bit different as well (yeah). I mean that’s how I would imagine, if I was wearing that I guess I’d imagine people would think that maybe I was bisexual (yeah) I dunno ...' (P13, Marie).

I include this brief theme to demonstrate two points. First, to represent that narratives of bisexual appearance are complex. Despite her belief in the invisibility of bisexuality, Marie did engage with the possibility that she looked a little bit bisexual. Although it was hard to pin down, there was ‘something’ that she was struggling to grasp. Second, the notion of an ‘alternative’ look associated with bisexuality had been discussed by some of the women involved in the bisexual community. They were unsure whether this look would be recognisable outside of bisexual space, but it seemed that Marie read the ‘alternativeness’ in her own appearance as related to her bisexuality.

Perhaps Marie has tapped into ‘something’, and there is a potential for a bisexual look and bisexual appearance norms (possibly based on alternative dress) to evolve. However, Marie’s narrative is far from certain. She only ‘thinks’ that she ‘probably’ looks bisexual, she ‘doesn’t know’, only ‘imagines’ that this look could convey her bisexuality. This uncertainty may arise from her feeling unable to be objective and ‘read’ her own appearance ‘accurately’. Alternatively the hesitance in her talk may reflect that she believes that this look is far from clear and yet to be firmly identifiable; hence bisexuality remains invisible.

**Spelling it out: ‘Hitting someone over the head with a cleaver’**

The women’s talk indicated that there was the potential for some form of visible bisexual look to emerge. However, their discussions were tentative, and the potential somewhat fragile. The end result was that the women remained invisible.

It seemed that, unlike lesbians who had visual codes which could communicate their sexuality, the only way that bisexual women could do so was through literally spelling it out. Three of the women in the bisexual community mentioned the ‘bisexual badges’, which are sold at Bicon, some of which are shown in Figures 7.1, 7.2, and 7.3.
"No, I’m BISEXUAL, you’re confused"

I asked Adele if there was a way to communicate bisexuality through appearance, outside the bisexual community. She believed there was not: ‘Apart from the badges people wear’ (P18, Adele). Eddy said ‘I bought these [badges] the first time I went to a bi event and I kept sort of topping up and stocking up’ (P15, Eddy). I include examples here (from http://www.uncharted-worlds.org) to demonstrate the messages that the badges carry, and the bright and colourful way in which they announce the wearer’s bisexuality.

With kind permission of the website author.
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Chapter Seven: “I can’t build up an image in my head of bisexuality”:
Bisexual women’s (lack of) visual identities

Claire’s talk revealed her belief that bi badges could be critically important in bisexual people being seen and recognised. It was clear that she believed that bi people are not currently visible, but that it is important that they become so:

‘I think [the] badges are really important (yep) because they actually make, although they’re very, y’know, they’re very statement-y, but they make you visible by giving you a bi, by actually physically (yeah) labelling you. And I think that’s probably what bisexuality needs, bisexuals need to do to be visible at the moment is physically label themselves’ (P14, Claire).

Hence the badges seemingly reveal a way in which women can adorn themselves and unambiguously communicate their sexuality. However, for this to be affective, people need to wear them. I asked Eddy whether she had seen people wearing them, to which she replied: ‘I haven’t seen them much around … I see them at events but I’ve not seen anyone I don’t know wearing them’ (P15, Eddy).

To understand why the badges may (not) be a successful strategy in raising visibility I draw on talk from Claire, and some of the women from outside the bisexual community. Claire conveyed the potential the badges hold. However, she also commented that they are ‘very statement-y’. Her phrasing suggests that this is problematic, and to make such a transparent ‘statement’ may not be agreeable, for either the wearer or, as she went on to say, for others:

‘But then when you inscribe it [bi/sexuality] physically it comes across as like, hitting someone over the head with a cleaver, y’know (mm, mm) and people kind of respond quite “why are you going on about it (mm, mm) like that” y’know (yeah, yeah). But then, but there isn’t really a way to finesse it because if you finesse it and you don’t actually physically write it about your person […] [then] no one knows what the fuck you’re talking about, and you’re just not gonna get read’ (P14, Claire).

Claire speculates that to wear a badge that blatantly states one’s sexuality may alienate others who lack an understanding of why it might be important to do so. Eddy, though not adverse to wearing and sharing her bisexual badges, talked about
the different levels of message that they conveyed: ‘I like the way that some of these are really explicit, ‘bi’, and some of them are just kind of nomic’ (P15, Eddy). I include some of the other badges which are available at Bicon to demonstrate these subtler messages to which Eddy refers.

![Figure 7.2. Bisexual badges II]

Some of the women who were not involved with the bisexual community seemed to confirm that there may be a reluctance to literally spell out sexuality. In the first few interviews I asked the women their opinions on t-shirts which profess sexuality\textsuperscript{141}, and whether they would wear them:

‘I think you’re, you know, that’s quite a political statement, and you’re obviously trying to court some attention through wearing it (mm) for whatever reason […] I don’t feel the need to do that’ (P4, Millie).

‘I remember thinking “wow that’s quite brave” (laughs) […] but not in sort of brave like, y’know, “ooh you’re gonna get lots of hassle”, but in a kind of way of like wow, you really want to kind of, send that message out don’t you […] I don’t feel the need to do that’ (P1, Gemma).

Millie and Gemma concluded that to literally spell sexuality out was a political and confrontational act. In Canadian qualitative research (Lo & Healy, 2000), ‘ flaunting’ sexuality through appearance was a contentious issue within particular lesbian (and gay) areas of Vancouver. Some lesbians that lived in these areas felt that visibility drew too much attention to their sexuality, which was linked with threat and violence, while

\textsuperscript{141}I stopped asking them about t-shirts when the interview schedule was revised to shorten the length of the interviews. The reasons questions around this topic were omitted was that the women did not own or wear clothing which announced their sexuality, and so the discussion quickly reached a dead end, and responses were rather limited.
others wished that there were more ‘out’ lesbians visible in their areas. Within heteronormative frameworks, it is not ‘acceptable’ to ‘flaunt’ non-heterosexuality, because to do so is political and subversive, and therefore interpreted as a defiant act (e.g., Beagan, 2003, also see Chapter Nine). This also mirrors the discussions which took place about appearance within the early homophile movement (see Chapter Two). Those women who were not members of bisexual community were seemingly keener to assimilate bisexuality with the mainstream, as evidenced in their discussions of third (visual) identity positions, and their rejection of subversive practices (such as wearing badges) which may give bisexual people a ‘bad name’.

In short, the women expressed that they felt invisible, and some managed their appearance (in complex ways) in an attempt to overcome this. However, most did not wish to be a ‘spokeswoman’ of their sexuality. In conclusion, if the statement is obvious, then it is ‘too much’, but if it is more subtle, it may not be effective in successfully conveying the message. Lesbians were understood to be able to choose to either be very apparent in displaying their sexuality, or to be more subtle through ‘codes’ and walks. For the bisexual women it was all or nothing (with the exception of the subtler versions of the badges, which do not seem to have made their way outside the bi community scene). This means that once again bisexuality largely remains invisible. I close by suggesting that it is clear that the notion of in/visibilty is not a new concept, within the bisexual community at least, as evidenced through one of the badges.

Figure 7.3. Bisexual badge: Visibility
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Chapter Seven: "I can't build up an image in my head of bisexuality":
Bisexual women's (lack of) visual identities

Discussion

This research has directly responded to calls by psychologists for studies which focus specifically on bisexual women and their appearance and visual identity (e.g., Taub, 1999; Clarke & Turner, 2007). This chapter, which has reported the results from the qualitative interviews with bisexual women, makes a significant contribution to filling the gap in the literature on the specificities of (a lack of) bisexual appearance and bisexual visual identity.

The women's talk quite clearly showed that they were able to recognise and describe particular lesbian visual identities. The images they portrayed mirrored those discussed in previous research (e.g., Esterberg, 2006; Krakauer, 2002; Clarke & Turner, 2007). In direct contrast, the women could not describe a clear image of bisexual visual identity. Their accounts indicated that bisexual women are unable to be seen or recognised by each other, and this has implications for bisexual women's wider sense of visibility within western culture. Without appearance norms, bisexual women are less likely to be able to express their identities in how they dress and appear. In turn, they cannot 'come out' through their appearance, or form coherent communities through shared visual identities in the ways in which lesbians have been able to (e.g., Esterberg, 1990; Rothblum, 1994a; Entwistle, 2000; Winn & Nutt, 2001; Clarke & Turner, 2007). However, these bisexual women positioned the lack of rigid constraints around bisexual appearance as liberating, and embraced the freedom which their identity allowed them.

In the interviews, participants described lesbians as constrained by appearance norms, and made reference to the 'policing' of lesbian looks, particularly within LGBT communities (e.g., Eves, 2004). They suggested that (masculine or butch) lesbian looks may, by conventional standards, be assumed to be physically unattractive (e.g., Rothblum, 1994a; Rudd, 1996). However, the women also recognised that lesbians could choose to adhere to other (more 'sexy') looks such as boyish butch, androgynous, or femme. While these looks may lead to less negative evaluations by heterosexual people (see, Rothblum, 1994a), they may leave more feminine lesbians (similarly to bisexual women) feeling unable to express their sexuality, and they may
also be accused of ‘passing’ and enjoying the privileges associated with heteronormative heterosexuality (e.g., Winn & Nutt, 2001; Rothblum, 2002). Interestingly, these women also explicitly spoke of heterosexual appearance, which they associated with (a seemingly exaggerated) femininity, and this notion is explored further in Chapter Nine, when I report the results of the qualitative survey.

These themes also reiterated the ways in which wider western culture understands sexual identity as dichotomous (e.g., Esterberg, 2002; Bowes-Catton, 2007), and such conceptualisations serve only to overlook or dismiss bisexuality. With this in mind, it is not surprising that the women had no clear sense of bisexual visual identity (Clarke & Turner, 2007). They could not choose to look bisexual, instead they could only (not) look lesbian or (not) look heterosexual. Despite this, appearance was clearly important to them, and they actively managed their appearance in ways which reflected their understandings of their bisexual identities more widely.
BISEXUAL WOMEN'S VISUAL IDENTITIES:

A FEMINIST MIXED-METHODS EXPLORATION

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FOR
REFERENCE
ONLY

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the University of the West of England, Bristol for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Part Two

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August 2011
The *Appearance and Sexual Identity Questionnaire (ASIQ)*: A quantitative investigation of beauty and the body

**Introduction**

In this chapter I provide details of the conception, development, and results of the quantitative questionnaire, which has been titled the *Appearance and Sexual Identity Questionnaire (ASIQ)*. In this chapter I discuss the rationale for developing the questionnaire, the existing literature around appearance related topics, and explain how the structure and content of the ASIQ were informed by previous research and findings from the interview data. I then outline the aims, and discuss the details of the scales included in the questionnaire, before moving on to the method, demographic information and the results. I conclude with a discussion of the findings and their implications.

**Conception and Development**

The interviews produced interesting insights into bisexual women’s visual identity and the ways in which they actively managed their appearance, from which I concluded that the women’s appearance practices could sometimes be associated with their bisexual identity, even though their talk clearly indicated that they would be unlikely to recognise other bisexual women through their visual presentation. Some of the women expressed an unwillingness to engage in removing body hair or wearing make-up, but nonetheless often reported experiences of feeling under pressure to conform to hairlessness/make-up norms. A quotation from Betty provides a useful example here:

‘[T]hroughout winter I do not bother shaving my legs at all. When it comes to summer I might do, but sometimes I might not [...] it’s very much a societal pressure thing (mm) (*laughs*). I don’t want to, sometimes I don’t care, but sometimes if I’m going to say, a spa (yep) that’s really posh, and I think “ok if I go in there with my really hairy legs and hairy armpits everybody’s going to stare at me and I’m going to feel really self-conscious (mm) and I’m not going to enjoy it” (mm), so that’s when I’ll shave (mm). But I won’t shave for my partner, and she’s not bothered about shaving for me either cos, it just seems silly (mm). And I think the same would apply, I would say the same applies to
the make-up thing. If I were in a relationship with a man I think I’d be exactly the same ... given that I felt just as comfortable (mm) with him (mm), and with my own body image in our relationship (mm yeah) ... but .... I don’t know’ (P2, Betty).

Some of the complexity of the linkages between appearance and identity are apparent in this quotation. Betty ponders whether her beauty practices would be different if she were in a relationship with a man. While she ‘thinks’ she would behave in exactly the same ways, she cannot be sure and this is reflected both in her hesitation, and in the ‘I don’t know’ which concludes her dialogue. These sorts of extracts are intriguing, and a quantitative questionnaire is a useful tool to explore beauty behaviours in relation to sexual identity.

In the interviews, the bisexual women had clearly recognised (masculine) lesbian and (feminine) heterosexual visual identities. I was keen to explore whether there were differences how bisexual, lesbian and heterosexual women conceived of their bodies and managed their appearance. I designed the questionnaire to investigate whether bisexual women have a distinct set of beauty practices, distinct from women of other sexualities. Therefore, women of all sexual identities were asked to participate, and a large sample was gathered, so that comparisons could be made between sexual identities. This enabled conclusions to be drawn about whether (resistance to) particular appearance practices could be linked to (bi)sexual identity.

Only a few of the interview participants commented on their body size and weight, even when directly asked. This is demonstrated, for example, in this quotation, in which Elizabeth is talking about photographs of her which were taken when she was larger than she was at the time of the interview:

Elizabeth: But there’s other pictures where I’m a bit bigger and I don’t look quite so bad as I do there. I remember when I first looked through it, thinking “Oh my God”, maybe that was the start of the weight loss (laughs).

Nikki: So was it something that bothered you, when you were a bit bigger?

Elizabeth: No, I never really thought about it, other than when I look back over pictures and people like you ask me (laughter) (P7, Elizabeth).
Elizabeth resisted engaging in talk about her weight and (most of) the other women simply did not raise the topic. This was unexpected because there is a body of literature which has emphasised body size as a critically important component of women’s appearance. Therefore, during the design stage of the interviews, it was anticipated that the women would talk about their size and weight, due to this overarching understanding that women are preoccupied with their bodies. The lack of talk about the topic could potentially have indicated that bisexual women were less concerned with weight and size than women of other sexual identities.

However, it may have been that other topics, such as other people’s (mis)understandings of their sexuality, were of higher priority for the bisexual women to focus on in their discussions. Therefore it was interesting to use quantitative methods to explore and compare results across different sexual identities.

In summary, the questionnaire was designed to examine the specificities of how women of different sexual identities manage their appearance, in order to provide information on, and contextualise, how bisexual women feel about, and manage their bodies and their appearance. Therefore the focus is upon the myriad of ways in which women are able to alter their appearance. Women can choose to (and aspire to) change the shape and size of their physical bodies. They can also add make-up, remove body hair, dress in different ways, and have different beliefs about how important appearance is. These topics, although often dismissed as women’s frivolities, are actually of great importance. How women understand their bodies has direct implications in relation to their physical and psychological wellbeing. Further, feminist scholars in particular have argued that to examine beauty practices is important, because they are reflective of women’s subordination to men (e.g., Bordo, 1993; Jeffreys, 2005). Women may feel under pressure to constantly and repetitively invest in their appearance, often in the interests of being attractive to men and meeting patriarchal cultural standards of appearance. This upholds male supremacy, and perpetuates notions that women exist mainly as men’s sexual objects. Furthermore, the money, time, and energy invested in the pursuit of the culturally prescribed ‘body beautiful’ could be better spent, for example in terms of happiness, family, educational, or career goals (e.g., Jeffreys, 2005; Labre, 2002). It was interesting to consider whether lesbian and bisexual women resisted cultural expectations.
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Chapter Eight: Appearance and Sexual Identity Questionnaire (ASIQ)

Literature Review

The relevance of feminism in relation to appearance

A review of the literature indicated that feminism has links both with appearance, and with sexual identity, and for this reason it was included in the ASIQ. Since the 1970s, feminist women have been othered as ‘monstrous outsiders’ (Hinds & Stacey, 2001:155), who do not wear bras, nor remove their body hair, and who reject traditional feminine appearance in their defiance of being treated purely as (men’s) sex objects. Negative stereotypes of feminists identified through the social sciences literature include notions that feminist women (despite being evaluated as ‘competent’) are disliked (e.g., Fiske, Cuddy, Gli, Glick & Xu, 2002) and unattractive (e.g., Goldberg, Gottesdiener & Abramson, 1971; Hinds & Stacey, 2001) particularly to men (e.g., Rudman & Fairchild, 2007). Such stereotypes may explain why many heterosexual women have been found to disassociate from ‘the F word’ (Zucker, 2004).

It has also been hypothesised that heterosexual women may fear identifying as feminist, for fear that they will be perceived to be a lesbian (Liss, O’Connor, Morosky & Crawford, 2001). This may stem from the (often inferred) link between feminism and lesbian sexual identity. This taken-for-granted association may originate in the intertwined history of lesbianism and feminism (as discussed in Chapter Two). Lesbians are assumed to be unconcerned with being attractive to men (e.g., Rothblum, 1994a), hence it seems plausible that they could be less/unaffected by the negative conceptualisations of the feminist woman, and therefore more willing and likely to identify as feminists. However, less research has explicitly referred to links between bisexual women and feminism.

Finally, recent research has concluded that while many young heterosexual women may hold beliefs which correspond with feminism, they do not necessarily identify as feminists (e.g., Zucker, 2004; Williams & Wittig, 1997). This is despite sociologists suggesting that stereotypes of unattractive feminists may have been superseded by ‘new feminism’, which has been ‘billed as the glamorous make-over of the old-

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142 Some of the bisexual women who were interviewed identified themselves as feminists. However recruitment strategy could account for this, because women who read The Spark and spend time in bisexual communities may be more likely to be (middle class, ‘alternative’) feminists.
fashioned, drab and over-serious "women's liberationists" of the past (Hinds & Stacey, 2001:153). This 'new feminism' is said to embrace a 'new-found reconciliation between feminism and femininity' (Hinds & Stacey, 2001:153).

It was apparent that sexual identity might influence how likely women are to identify as feminist. In turn, identification with feminist beliefs (even if the feminist label is not embraced), might impact upon a woman's appearance, particularly if women feel freed from 'traditional' beauty practices through their feminist affiliation. Because lesbian and bisexual women might be more likely to associate with feminism, it is important to consider whether it is their feminist affiliation, or their sexual identity per se which affects their results (should they be significantly different). For these reasons, it was important to incorporate a measure of feminism in the ASI/Q, which would make it possible to both analyse and control for feminist beliefs when reporting the results.

The lesbian body

Lesbian's body image has received considerable academic attention, mostly around appearance in relation to 'thin ideals', body esteem, and body (dis)satisfaction. There are essentially two underlying theories which inform the research in this area.

The first is that lesbians will have less body dissatisfaction and higher 'body esteem' than heterosexual women. This was first proposed in the 1980s, when it was theorised that because lesbians dealt with the 'stigma' of their sexual identity, they became better equipped to 'challenge the rules' including those that dictate how women's bodies 'should' look (Brown, 1987). More recently scholars have also identified that appearance pressures around 'body image' can arise from women's desire to appear attractive to men (see, for example, Rothblum, 1994a; Share & Mintz, 2002). Lesbians are theorised as devoid of such appearance pressures due to their disinterest in (or even rejection of) men's approval of how they look. Therefore, lesbians may be less concerned with their appearance, and less affected by mainstream appearance norms, than heterosexual women (Rothblum, 1994a). Further, lesbians are understood to engage in a specifically lesbian culture which is considered to place less importance on 'traditional' appearance ideals than mainstream culture (e.g., Brown, 1987; Beren, Hayden, Willfley & Grilo, 1996; Share & Mintz, 2002; Koff, Lucas, Migliorini &
Grossmith, 2010), and therefore be more accepting of diversity in body shape and size (e.g., Brown, 1987; Beren, Hayden, Willey & StStriegel-Moore, 1997).

The second theory, first proposed by Dworkin (1989), is that lesbians will experience the same pressure as heterosexual women because they do not exist within a ‘social vacuum’ and therefore undergo similar socialisation processes as other women. Accordingly they are predicted to have the same notions of an ‘ideal’ body because those ideals are so ingrained within (patriarchal) culture and society, of which lesbians are still a part (e.g., Dworkin, 1989; Heffernan, 1996; Share & Mintz, 2002; Koff et al., 2010).

The findings of research in this area have been in rather mixed, with support for both theories. Some quantitative researchers have concluded that lesbians are less dissatisfied with their bodies than heterosexual women (e.g., Brand, Rothblum & Solomon, 1992) and lesbian identity has been found to predictive of higher body image scores and less negative attitudes towards weight (Owens, Hughes & Owens-Nicholson, 2003). This has led these authors to conclude that lesbians are protected from appearance pressures. However, others have concluded that lesbian and heterosexual women experience similar scores on a range of measures of body dissatisfaction (e.g., Heffernan, 1996; Koff et al., 2010) and that affiliation to a lesbian community does not affect levels of body dissatisfaction (e.g., Beren et al., 1996).

Share and Mintz (2002) found that although lesbians had higher levels of body esteem in relation to sexual attractiveness, and lower levels of ‘internalization of cultural standards’ (p.90) than heterosexual women, there were no differences in body esteem in relation to weight or physical condition, nor in relation to awareness of cultural standards of appearance. Similarly, a meta-analysis of previous quantitative research on body image satisfaction (Morrison, Morrison & Sager, 2004) concluded that although there were no reliable differences between lesbian and heterosexual women, findings still implied that ‘lesbian women may be slightly more satisfied with their bodies’ (Morrison et al., 2004:135). It is clear that the picture remains one of mixed conclusions.
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There is also some qualitative research in this area. For example, in Beren, Hayden, Wilfley & Striegel-Moore’s (1997) U.S. interview study, lesbian participants appeared to reject the frail female version of slimness, but also talked about a beauty ideal that ‘clearly encompassed thinness [and the lesbians] continually voiced [...] a discrepancy between their actual and ideal values and experiences’ (p.440). The authors also identified that lesbians may in fact have different additional pressures, in particular to be fit, muscular and athletic in their appearance, a look which in itself was equated with thinness (Beren et al., 1997). In another U.S. interview study (Myers, Taub, Morris & Rothblum, 1999) some of the lesbians who participated felt freed from ‘traditional’ beauty norms and appearance pressures. Others acknowledged that lesbians were affected by the same appearance norms as heterosexual women, particularly in relation to weight.

The bisexual body

Researchers rarely include bisexual participants in their research on sexual identity and body image (see, for example, Brand et al., 1992; Heffernan, 1996; Beren et al., 1996). In the minimal studies that have included bisexual people, only a few bisexual participants have taken part. This becomes problematic when analysing data and researchers have addressed this problem in two ways.

First, studies have sometimes merged groups of bisexual and lesbian women in order to create one ‘lesbian and bisexual’ or ‘same-sex attracted’ category (e.g., Myers et al., 1999; Austin, Ziyadeh, Kahn, Camargo, Colditz & Field, 2004). This stems from the notion that if a woman is attracted to other women, then she can be classed as ‘same-sex attracted’. However, this strategy fails to acknowledge that bisexual women are likely to be attracted to (and wish to attract) both ‘same-sex’ and ‘different-sex’ partners. Therefore, amalgamating bisexual women with either lesbian or heterosexual women is problematic. Second, particularly in more recent research, authors have drawn the conclusion that bisexual identity is distinct from either lesbian or heterosexual identity, hence bisexual participants are omitted from their data completely (e.g., Share and Mintz, 2002). Both of these strategies effectively serve to invisibilise bisexual women’s experiences of body image as they become incorporated with lesbians, or with heterosexuals, or omitted entirely.
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For these reasons, qualitative studies are more informative of specifically bisexual women’s experiences. A U.S. qualitative study (Taub, 1999) focused on bisexual women, and found that coming out as bisexual affected women’s appearance beliefs and practices. While findings were somewhat mixed, it seemed that the gender of their current partner impacted upon their appearance practices. These bisexual women ‘felt more pressure to conform to heterosexual standards’ (p.35) of beauty and appearance when in a relationship with a man, than they did when with a woman.

Bisexual women may have similar body image concerns to heterosexual women when in same-sex relationships, and to lesbians when in ‘opposite’-sex relationships (e.g., Taub, 1999), or perhaps depending on whether they socialise in mainly heterosexual, or mainly lesbian spaces. Feminist U.S. psychologist Esther Rothblum (2002), reviewed the literature on sexuality and body image, and noted the lack of focus specifically on bisexual body image. She suggested that bisexual women may have their own set of appearance values, independent of lesbian or heterosexual women. Alternatively, bisexual women may consistently feel less pressure than heterosexual women, but slightly more than lesbians (i.e., they fit somewhere ‘in the middle’ on an imagined scale of body image concern) (Rothblum, 2002).

However, in light of the non-conclusive findings of lesbian research it may be that bisexual, heterosexual, and lesbians all have similar results on measures of body image. This research aims to generate a large enough sample to analyse the bisexual women’s data independently of either lesbian or heterosexual women’s results. This will provide new insight into the previously invisiblised population of bisexual women. Women’s (dis)satisfaction with their bodies has important physical and psychological health implications, and this research will contribute further knowledge in order to help understand the links between sexual identity and appearance concerns.

The feminist body

It is not unusual for psychologists to consider feminism as a moderating or mediating factor in research on body image. Quantitative research has considered whether feminist beliefs protect against body (dis)satisfaction (e.g., Grippo & Hill; 2008; Myers & Crowther, 2007; Fingeret & Gleaves, 2004). Findings in these studies have often been mixed, for example, in two U.S. studies, feminist beliefs did not
moderate awareness and 'internalization of sociocultural appearance standards' (Fingeret & Gleaves, 2004:377) nor did they serve a protective function for body image dissatisfaction or self-objectification (Grippo & Hill, 2008). In another U.S. study, Myers and Crowther (2007) found that feminism did not act as a moderator between internalisation of the 'thin ideal' and social influence (Myers & Crowther, 2007). However, the authors also concluded that feminism did have a moderating effect on relationships between media awareness and the internalisation of the 'thin ideal', demonstrating the contradictory findings apparent in this area.

In a U.S. meta-analysis of the effect of feminism on body image 'problems' (Murnen & Smolak, 2009), the prediction was made that those with feminist beliefs would have the ability to 'critique cultural pressures' (p186) to be thin, and in consequence would have a positive body image. The authors hypothesised that feminism would be linked to positive body attitudes, which they represented in measures of body dissatisfaction, body esteem and shame. Further, they hypothesised that feminist identity would be negatively linked with 'drive for thinness [...] eating disordered attitudes [...] and internalization of the thin media ideal' (p188). They concluded that strongly identifying with feminism could indeed protect against extreme body dissatisfaction. They also found an association between feminist identification and lower drives for thinness, and lower scores on inventories of eating disorders. Finally, they found that feminist women were less affected by media images of slenderness ideals, although these relationships are rather weak (Murnen & Smolak, 2009).

Research in the area of sexual identity, and feminism and body image, has been mainly conducted with samples of white psychology students in the U.S. Body image and sexual identity, or body image and feminist beliefs, have been considered, but the literature has tended to omit the consideration of body image and sexual identity alongside feminist beliefs. While researchers may acknowledge or assume a link between lesbian identity and feminism (e.g., Beren et al., 1997), few control for feminism, or unpick the assumed link between the two.

The ASIQ will be one of the first British studies to take feminism into consideration alongside 'body image'. It will also make a unique contribution to the literature in its consideration of both sexual identity and feminist beliefs, and aims to recruit a more diverse sample than in previous research.
The feminine body

The bisexual women who were interviewed often referred to feminine women as ‘girly’ and associated overtly feminine appearance with heterosexual women. They also recognised the ‘opposite’ image of the butch masculine lesbian, who rejected ‘traditional’ beauty practices. The ASIQ can explore these images by asking a large sample of women about their beauty practices.

In this section I draw upon both mainstream, and feminist social science research, which has considered feminism, sexual identity, and beauty, in order to unpick ‘traditional beauty practices’, which contribute to the ‘biological’ female body becoming a ‘cultural’ feminine woman.

As early as the 1950s, psychologists noted that women’s investment in feminine appearance could provide information about social status:

‘[C]hanges in dress and grooming are universally employed to denote the movement from one social status to another (infancy, childhood, sexual maturity, maternity, anility, death) […] The girl who wears cosmetics is insisting on her right to be treated as a woman rather than a child; likewise, the elderly woman wearing cosmetics is insisting that she not be consigned to the neutral sex of old age’ (Wax, 1957:588-589).

Perhaps it would be pertinent to add ‘feminist’ and ‘sexual identity’ to the list of social statuses. Findings indicate that traditional (prescribed) notions of ‘beauty’ are incompatible with both feminist beliefs, and lesbian identity. In both qualitative and quantitative studies, feminists are considered less likely to engage in ‘beauty’ practices such as hair removal (e.g., Rúdólfsdóttir & Jolliffe, 2008; Basow, 1991), and as a result are more likely to be considered lesbians (e.g., Rúdólfsdóttir & Jolliffe, 2008; Rudman & Fairchild, 2007).

Lesbians have often been understood as masculine and unattractive (Blackman & Perry, 1990; Rothblum, 1994a), which can be explained by lesbian feminists’ traditional disassociation from normative practices of dress, make-up and body hair removal. Feminist scholars have also been critical of the expectations that are placed upon women:
Given the reality of imposed femininity, each woman is faced with the choice of accommodation and its rewards of sexual and social approval, or rebellion and the punishing ridicule reserved for the “asexual” and ugly. For those choosing rebellion, the world’s hostile judgement is easily internalized and constantly reinforced’ (Chapkis, 1986:131, emphasis in original).

These (often taken-for-granted) imposed beauty practices can be understood as ‘trappings of femininity […] constructed by ‘hetteropatricahy” (Blackman & Perry, 1990:68). Lesbians are historically more likely to reject such practices:

‘With flat shoes, baggy trousers, unshaven legs and faces bare of makeup, their style combines practicality with a strong statement about not dressing for men. Consistent with the belief that fashion reinforces the gender distinctions between men and women, they reject those aspects of women’s fashion that signal the oppressive hierarchy of heterosexuality’ (Blackman & Perry, 1990:68)

While ‘lesbians’ and ‘feminists’ are understood to reject particular beauty practices, only one previous study has specifically investigated how bisexual women might look in relation to their identity. In this U.S. qualitative survey, 74 bisexual women were asked about their beauty practices. Over a third of participants reported that they reduced their hair removal and make-up use after coming out as bisexual (Taub, 1999). This suggests that bisexual women may resist beauty practices, just as lesbians are theorised to do.

This questionnaire will allow for a wider exploration of bisexual women’s femininity and beauty practices, and enable comparisons across sexual identity. I turn now to the research that has taken place around the ‘traditional’ beauty practices of removing body hair and wearing make-up, which are considered to be a key part of making the ‘female feminine’. It is from these findings that existing scales were chosen, and new scales developed, for use in the ASIQ.
The hairy body

The beauty practice which has received most academic attention is body hair removal, despite it being commonly trivialised. To remove body hair is so socially normative that it is virtually an obligatory practice within western culture (Basow, 1991; Basow & Braman, 1998; Tiggeman & Kenyon, 1998; Toerien & Wilkinson, 2003; 2004; Tiggeman & Lewis, 2004; Toerien, Wilkinson & Choi, 2005). The hairless ideal is perpetuated by its implicit presence in media images of hairless women (e.g., Tiggeman & Kenyon, 1998; Toerien & Wilkinson, 2003). The obligatory nature of hair removal has been illustrated both in academic research, and through mainstream mass media, for example in the 'uproar' in response to U.S. actress Julia Roberts appearing with visible armpit hair at a film premiere (Winterman, 2007). To be hairless is not only a norm, but also a fundamental underpinning of both being feminine, and in turn being sexually attractive to men (Basow, 1991).

During the 1980s, feminist researchers began to take an interest in facial hair as a social taboo (e.g., Brownmiller, 1984/1986; Chapkis, 1986), but since the 1990s feminist psychologists have explored other body hair. I now discuss this small body of literature, which offers insight into how body hair removal became so normative. I then provide an overview of recent research, and end the section with a discussion of the implications for women if they choose not to remove their body hair.

Clothing styles became more revealing of women’s bodies in the early 1900s, and the consumer industry saw the opportunity to make body hair removal a lucrative concern. In order to do so, they suggested that body hair (initially underarm hair) was “‘superfluous’, “unwanted”, “ugly” and “unfashionable” (Basow, 1991:84). As the 20th century progressed, women’s removal of their armpit and leg hair became popular (Basow, 1991), despite the potential pain and danger involved, particularly with early techniques (Toerien & Wilkinson, 2003). Body hair removal came to be not only normative, but also associated with hygiene, cleanliness and sexual attractiveness (to men) (Basow, 1991). The effect of this is that women are led to believe that their bodies are unsatisfactory, or even deficient, in their ‘natural’ state (Basow, 1991; Tiggeman & Kenyon, 1998; Labre, 2002). This is a clear example of the way in which the consumer industry has an interest in advocating that women’s bodies need to be altered in order to be socially acceptable. Further, excessive body hair is framed as needing to be ‘cured’ through products which describe themselves...
as a ‘treatment’ (Labre, 2002). By bolstering these beliefs, companies (selling razors and hair removal cream among other products) are able to effectively manipulate women into buying their goods. This has proved an extremely successful strategy, as evidenced in the company Gillette\textsuperscript{144} being purchased in 2005 for £35 billion (Poulter, 2009), which demonstrates just how lucrative the body hair removal market is. It has been identified that:

‘[t]aken together, the present-day, powerful normative status of women’s hair removal, and the wide range of available products, work to create a world in which ‘choice’ means ‘choice of product’ rather than ‘choice of whether or not to depilate’ (Toerien et al., 2005:404).

Body hair has become a clear marker of gender and upholds a dividing line between men and women (Basow, 1991; Toerien & Wilkinson, 2003). For a woman to have visible body hair is for her to have ‘bridged the boundaries between masculinity and femininity’ (Toerien & Wilkinson, 2003:335). This ‘boundary’ is somewhat fictitious: while women often do have a tendency towards less body hair than men, this is not always the case. Hence, the notion that women are hairless is largely a culturally created myth and ‘each woman knows that her transformation from female to feminine is artificial’ (Kitzinger & Willmott, 2002:355, emphasis added), as evidenced in the high levels of effort required for women to produce and maintain the hairless body, which upholds the societal distinction between what constitutes ‘man’ and ‘woman’ (e.g., Kitzinger & Willmott, 2002; Toerien & Wilkinson, 2003).

Further, that hairlessness and femininity are so interwoven seems somewhat erroneous when a woman’s body hair is actually a reflection of her sexual maturity (Tiggemann & Kenyon, 1998). However, body hair removal also reflects current beauty ideals of ‘youth’ (Basow, 1991; Tiggemann & Kenyon, 1998). Indeed, body hair removal has been critiqued by feminists as a practice which subjugates women by making them appear sexually immature, young, and childlike, and therefore sexually passive in relation to men (Labre, 2002; Toerien & Wilkinson, 2003). The idealised hairless body may perpetuate men’s ‘fantasy of engaging in sex with

\textsuperscript{144}Gillette is a multinational brand, now part of the company Proctor and Gamble who have been reported to be the world’s largest personal consumer goods firm (Finch, 2008). While much of Gillette’s worth lies in razors for men, they also sell women’s razors, which are in strong demand and were in part credited for increased profits immediately prior to the merger of these two companies (Grant, 2005).
prepubescent girls’ and therefore ‘contribute to the sexual objectification of girls’ (Labre, 2002:125).

It has been theorised that both feminists and lesbians will be less likely to remove their body hair than heterosexual or non-feminist women. The logic behind this is that feminists will be less likely to adhere to normative expectations of beauty, because they will understand them as oppressive practices to be resisted (Basow, 1991; Labre, 2002). Lesbians (and perhaps bisexual women) will not need to engage in body hair removal because they are less/un interested in being sexually attractive to men (Basow, 1991). There are also stereotypes which link lesbians with masculinity and an associated resistance to adhering to ‘feminine’ norms (Eliason, Donelan & Randall, 1993).

Research has concluded that the majority of women remove their body hair (e.g., Basow, 1991; Tiggermann & Kenyon, 1998; Toerien et al., 2005; Lipton, Sherr, Elford, Rustin & Clayton, 2006), and the main reasons for doing so are to comply with social norms and to feel attractive and feminine.

Basow (1991) analysed differences in women’s hair removal practices according to feminist beliefs and sexual identity. Overall 81% (and 72% of those with strong feminist beliefs) removed their body hair. However, as feminist beliefs increased, so did the likelihood that leg and underarm hair were not removed. Lesbians and ‘bisexual’ women were significantly less likely to remove their leg hair than heterosexual women. For those who did remove body hair, why they continued to do so differed depending on their sexual identity. Basow (1991) concluded that:

‘lesbians are less likely to conform to the norm of hairlessness for women, but when they do conform behaviourally, they do so primarily to avoid social

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145 Basow acknowledges that the overall figure seems somewhat low ‘given the pervasiveness of the hairless norm’ (1991:93). She attributes this to the (feminist) characteristics of the sample.
146 However, most of the sample (61%) identified themselves as strongly feminist, and as a consequence the ‘moderately feminist’ and ‘little’ or ‘not at all’ feminist groups were combined to compare against the ‘strong’ feminists. This means that results must be interpreted with some caution.
147 The women were asked to rate their sexual identity on a five point Likert scale ranging from ‘exclusively heterosexual’ (63%) to ‘exclusively lesbian’ (12%). Due to small numbers in the middle of the range (12% ‘primarily heterosexual’, 6% ‘bisexual’ and 8% ‘primarily lesbian’), Basow chose to merge these groups to form one ‘larger bisexual group’ (1991:92). While this was a practical solution, she has arguably defined some of the women’s sexual identity for them (possibly inaccurately) and so these results must again be interpreted with some caution.
disapproval rather than to fit in with the conventional heterosexual norm of female attractiveness’ (Basow, 1991:94).

These findings suggest that body hair practices differ according to feminist beliefs and sexual identity. However, the small numbers and (deliberate) nature of the sample (educated, professional white women from the U.S. with a mean age of 44) means that conclusions can be drawn only cautiously.

Tiggeman and Kenyon (1998) replicated Basow’s (1991) research with Australian student populations from a university (mean age 22 years) and a high school (mean age 14 years). They reported that over 90% of these young women had removed body hair from their legs and underarms. The most highly rated reasons given by participants for continuing to remove body hair were related to ‘femininity and attractiveness’. Although the authors predicted that non-hair-removers would be more likely to be feminists, there were no significant differences between hair-removers and non-removers on feminism scores. However, those who identified more strongly as feminists were less likely to endorse reasons for body hair removal. While this study did not consider sexual identity, it did ask participants to fill out a measure of self esteem. Among the university students, those who did not remove their body hair had higher self-esteem scores. They suggest that this is because women with lower self-esteem will find their bodies less satisfactory and feel more pressure to adhere to cultural expectations of ‘the body beautiful’ (Tiggeman & Kenyon, 1998).

A U.K. quantitative study used closed questions rather than traditional Likert scales (Toerien et al., 2005) and found that 99.71% of respondents had removed body hair at some point, from some part of their body, most commonly from underarms and legs (over 90%), and from their pubic area and eyebrows (over 80%). The authors highlight that on certain parts of the body, hair is not necessarily condemned providing it be tamed appropriately (e.g., the well shaped eyebrow). For this reason the consideration of hair removal by specific body location is important when analysing body hair practices (Toerien et al., 2005).

Finally, a U.K. qualitative survey (Toerien & Wilkinson, 2004) investigated women’s experiences of the hairlessness norm and findings were similar to those in quantitative research. Participants removed their body hair to comply with social
norms, and reported hairlessness as ‘attractive, smooth, clean and tidy, and feminine’, (e.g., entirely positive). In contrast, to be a hairy woman was described as ‘unattractive, stubbly, unclean and untidy, and masculine’ (e.g., entirely negative) (p.85). These studies confirm the normative social pressures which encourage women to remove body hair, particularly in order to be (sexually) attractive (to men).

I now provide examples of where the literature has discussed the implications for those who do not comply with the prescriptive messages around body hair removal. In their review of the literature, Toerien and Wilkinson (2003) concluded that there are profound social and psychological effects on women who are perceived to have an ‘excessive’ amount of body hair. These included women feeling it necessary to strategically cover the body, and even avoid physical contact with others, demonstrating the stigmatisation they felt. Similarly, U.K. qualitative research with women who had been diagnosed with polycystic ovarian syndrome (PCOS) (a condition which includes (so-called) excessive hair growth) considered their body and facial hair highly problematic (Kitzinger & Willmott, 2002). They described their hair as “upsetting, “distressing”, “embarrassing”, “unsightly”, “dirty” and “distasteful”” (p.353), and discussed how their hair made them feel unfeminine and unwomanly, to the extent that they viewed themselves as ‘freaks’ (Kitzinger & Willmott, 2002:352).

In experimental U.S. research (Basow & Braman, 1998), a model with body hair was perceived by both men and women participants as significantly more aggressive148, but less sexually attractive, less sociable, less intelligent, and less happy than a model without body hair. Overall, women who participated in this experiment had more positive views of body hair than men did. This was explained by the participants’ affiliation to feminism149 because they are less likely to hold a model of beauty that is as restrictive and prescriptive as those who do not have feminist beliefs. Similarly findings from U.K. qualitative research have identified that there are ramifications for women who choose not to remove body hair:

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148 There was also a positive perception: the model with body hair was also understood to be stronger and more active.
149 Basow and Braman (1998) note that the woman with body hair may have been assessed as a lesbian and/or as a feminist. On this basis negative evaluations may be less a reflection of body hair per se. Instead negative judgements of women’s body hair may be based on what body hair portrays about the cultural status of women.
‘Should a woman fail to depilate she is likely to be subject to a range of interactional sanctions, including: suggestions, injunctions and pressure, complaints, criticisms and comments; jokes, teases and nicknames; looks, stares and ‘noticings’. These sanctions serve, in more or less overt ways to ‘enforce’ the depilation norm’ (Toerien & Wilkinson, 2004:85).

These findings reflect the powerful expectations to remove body hair, which reiterates women’s requirement to fulfil very particular appearance practices before they become ‘entitled’ to have a positive body image (Basow & Braman, 1998). Women’s bodies are not acceptable until they have been altered to fit with cultural ideals of beauty (Tiggeman & Kenyon, 1998; Labre, 2002), hence, women who do not subscribe to societal expectations around body hair removal will be judged negatively for their non-compliance, and made to feel that their bodies are a social aberration.

To summarise, research has indicated that most U.K. and U.S. women remove their body hair, mainly in order to comply with societal expectations of what it means to be attractive (to men). It is plausible that behaviour and beliefs about body hair may differ according to cultural background and country of origin, for example there is a cultural belief that German women are more likely to have hairy armpits, but the psychological literature seemingly did not engage with this topic. However, a recent German marketing company’s report of women’s bodies (Dagneaud, 2006) concluded that there is an:

‘increasingly widespread practice of shaving armpits and the bikini zone: body hair is primarily seen as a cause and intensifier of body odour and only on a secondary level is it seen as a physical imperfection. The cult icon Nena shocked the whole of England in the nineteen eighties with her hairy armpits – inconceivable on a German singer of today’.

Within European and U.S. culture it may be that body hair removal practices are becoming more similar. It is anticipated that most participant’s body hair behaviours will in the main reflect the hairlessness norm. However, feminists, lesbians, and bisexual women may be less likely to remove body hair. The ASIQ will be useful to further unravel the differences in body hair behaviour and beliefs according to feminist affiliation and sexual identity.
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Chapter Eight: Appearance and Sexual Identity Questionnaire (ASIQ)

Made-up bodies

There is a minimal amount of any psychological research (feminist or otherwise) around the topics of make-up and cosmetics, and what exists is mainly rather dated. Cash and Cash (1982) measured correlations between women's make-up use and their results on a range of scales. These included self and body consciousness, social anxiety and various body image factors. They concluded that women who were dissatisfied with their bodies were more likely to spend greater time applying cosmetics and to value make-up more highly. Their interpretation was that women may use make-up in order to compensate for unhappiness with their body image.

Findings from more recent research into eating behaviours, self esteem and body image could potentially be extrapolated to draw conclusions about make-up use. Women who have higher levels of investment in their appearance more widely have been shown to have higher levels of body image dissatisfaction and:

'greater internalization of appearance-related media ideals, and more frequent dysphoric body image emotions in a range of situational contexts [...] With respect to psychosocial functioning, we found that women and men with greater self-evaluative and overall investment in their appearance reported more perfectionist concerns about how they presented themselves to others, had poorer global self-esteem, and reported more disturbed eating attitudes' (Cash, Melnyk & Hrabosky, 2004:313).

Cash and Cash (1982) also found that higher cosmetics use was positively correlated with higher scores on scales of public self and body-consciousness, which suggests that women wear make-up because they expect to be evaluated by others, and are concerned about other's perceptions.

Indeed, much of the research in this area has focused on self-evaluations and/or other's perceptions. In one study (Cash, Dawson, Davis, Bowen & Galumbeck, 1989), women who saw themselves in a mirror when wearing make-up rated both their satisfaction with their faces, and their overall appearance, significantly more highly than when they viewed their face without make-up. These women also predicted that peers who did not know them would rate them as more attractive in photographs where they wore make-up. As the women predicted, men judged the photographs of them wearing no make-up as significantly less attractive than the
photos of them with make-up\textsuperscript{150}. These findings imply that women value themselves as more attractive when they wear make-up, and that men's perception of women are positively influenced by make-up use.

A more recent experiment developed a number of different make-up conditions (Mulhern, Fieldman, Hussey, Lévêque & Pinaau, 2003). These were no make-up, foundation only, eye make-up only, lipstick only, and full facial make-up. Male and female heterosexual\textsuperscript{151} participants were asked to sort photographs of women into order of attractiveness. More than half rated the photographs of women with a full face of make-up as the most attractive; the eye make-up and foundation conditions were rated as next most attractive, and the lipstick-only and no-make-up conditions as least attractive. The authors concluded that make-up enhances how attractive and desirable women are perceived to be, particularly by men. This was tested in a French experiment (Guéguen, 2008), where a woman who wore make-up was significantly more likely to be approached by men in a bar than a woman who was make-up free. Further, biological psychologists found that men viewed smooth skin as attractive (Fink, Grammer & Thornhill, 2001), and it has been noted elsewhere that foundation is able to homogenise skin, making it look 'blemish' free and smooth (Mulhern et al., 2003).

Make-up may also have other connotations beyond the realm of how attractive it makes women look to others, or feel about themselves. In an experimental study (Kyle & Mahler, 1996), U.S. college students were shown photos of women either wearing make-up, or not wearing make-up\textsuperscript{152}. They were then asked to rate the woman's capability for an accountancy job, and allocate her a salary based on her résumé (curriculum vitae) which included a photograph. In the no make-up condition the woman was judged to be significantly more capable, and assigned a higher salary, than when she was wearing cosmetics. The authors conclude that make-up may be associated with femininity, and that femininity is not traditionally

\textsuperscript{150} However, there were no significant differences between conditions when it was other women who rated the photographs.

\textsuperscript{151} This was the only quantitative study in which sexual identity was mentioned. The authors considered that 'homosexual' participants may have different perceptions of female attractiveness and therefore screened participant's sexual identity (Mulhern et al., 2003). They did not elaborate on this.

\textsuperscript{152} The experiment also included different hair colours. Those with brunette hair were considered significantly more capable (and assigned a higher salary) than those with red or blonde hair (Kyle & Mahler, 1996). While this is not directly applicable here, it does further evidence how perceptions of competence are influenced by women's appearance.
associated with traits that are valued in the work place, such as competency. However, these results were not supported by a recent online, questionnaire based, experimental U.K. study (Nash, Fieldman, Hussey, Lévêque & Pineau, 2006), in which participants were asked to rate images of women both with and without makeup. Women wearing make-up were judged to be of higher professional status, with higher earning potential, as well as healthier and more confident than women without make-up (Nash et al., 2006). These differences may be attributable to cultural differences between the U.S. and U.K., or to the methods used and the samples generated, or to changes in cultural expectations around make-up over the last ten years.

Richetin, Croizet and Huguet (2004) reached the conclusion that ‘implicit attitudes’ towards make-up were positive, based on student’s association between make-up, high professional status and ‘pleasant’ words (e.g., sun, holiday), less so than ‘unpleasant’ words (e.g., poison, cancer). However, Richetin et al. (2004) reported surprise at their results, and describe other research which found that if women wear ‘too much’ make-up they will be perceived negatively (e.g., Johnson & Lewis, 1988; Workman & Johnson, 1991). Indeed, they also report on another experiment, in which their findings contradict that of their research reported above. When they asked participants to rate pictures of women (either taken from magazines, or chosen specifically for their research) both on attractiveness and on a number of personality traits, participants judged the photographs of women who wore make-up as more attractive. However, they were also more likely to attribute them as having negative personality traits. The authors conclude that:

‘a woman wearing distinctive (heavier) makeup can be seen as choosing to send strong seduction signals (sexually confident/assertive and possibly unfaithful). She can also be seen as highly invested in her appearance (vain, shallow, and not so bright) and highly motivated by hiding who she really is (dishonest)’ (Huguet, Croizet & Richetin, 2004:1765).

These findings demonstrate the contradictions in research on this topic. More critically findings such as these highlight how women tread a tightrope of make-up use. To wear no make-up can lead to women being assessed as lazy, non-compliant, and less attractive. On the other hand, to wear ‘too much’ make-up will lead to negative evaluations based on vanity and dishonesty.
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In a U.S. qualitative study, Dellinger and Williams (1997) interviewed heterosexual and lesbian women. The women all discussed how make-up was a ‘norm’ in the workplace, and the heterosexual women spoke of how if had a ‘day off’ wearing make-up, then colleagues enquired about their health. They also discussed that they felt ‘better’ and more confident when they wore make-up. The authors suggest that heterosexual women’s investment in appearance is a signifier of care and respect for men, implying that lesbians (and potentially bisexual women) could be less invested in make-up use.

Wearing make-up was also considered a symbol of heterosexuality, although it was the lesbian participants who were more likely to make links between appearance and sexual identity. Lesbians who chose not to wear make-up reported comments from colleagues and managers that they ought to do so. Other lesbians specifically wore make-up to nullify any potential difference or distraction that not doing so may cause. The authors argue that lesbian participants recognise that there is a way to comply ‘to heterosexual norms of feminine appearance’ (Dellinger & Williams, 1997:162). To not do so would draw comments and criticisms, and was anticipated to potentially hinder their professional lives (Dellinger & Williams, 1997).

To summarise, most experimental quantitative studies have concluded that it is in women’s interest to wear some make-up, as they will be evaluated more positively. However, it would seem that those who wear ‘too much’ make-up will be evaluated negatively. Based on these findings lesbian’s lack of interest in men’s attention could translate into them being less likely to wear make-up. This would also be theoretically plausible if lesbians affiliate with feminist beliefs and therefore reject traditional notions of beauty. However, this may not be the case if they feel there are benefits to be gained from complying with heterosexual norms. Finally, the emergence of ‘lipstick lesbians’ and broader styles of appearance may mean that lesbians appear no differently from other women. Bisexual women’s make-up practices have received minimal exploration. This questionnaire will be extremely useful in providing a U.K. perspective on women’s make-up use in relation to sexual identity.
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Chapter Eight: Appearance and Sexual Identity Questionnaire (ASIQ)

Recognition

As discussed in previous chapters, recognition has been a critical part of lesbian and gay visual identities, particularly historically. I was interested to explore whether lesbians still feel that to be recognisable as visibly lesbian is important to them. Scholars have acknowledged that appearance can ‘make a statement’ about identity:

'Some lesbians welcome the ways in which their choice of style enables them to be recognized as gay. When their style makes an obvious statement about sexuality and politics, this is commonly used to identify the wearer with a particular subculture. [...] In this way, style and lifestyle are considered to be windows to the lesbian’s ‘real’ self' (Blackman & Perry, 1990:75).

Further, an undercurrent through much of the bisexual literature, and particularly in the findings of the interviews with bisexual women, was the literal invisibility of bisexuality. Bisexual women were unable to present themselves in such a way that their appearance provides a similar window to their ‘real’ selves. I was keen to explore whether this ‘mattered’ to bisexual women, and to find out about this issue specifically and directly with a large sample. Therefore lesbian, bisexual and heterosexual women were asked to complete a self-developed scale of recognition.
Aims

The overall aim of this study was to ascertain whether bisexual women’s appearance related behaviours differed in a way that might indicate that they have a clear sense of visual identity, distinct from heterosexual or lesbian women.

Therefore, the specific aims were to use quantitative measures to explore how bisexual women feel about their bodies, and how they manage their appearance. In order to do this, bisexual women’s results were compared with lesbian and heterosexual women’s results on a number of scales. These scales included measures of feminism, feelings about the body, body hair, make-up, and femininity. The study also aimed to investigate whether bisexual, heterosexual, and lesbian women believed that their sexual identity could be recognised through their appearance, as this may offer insight into visibility.

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were generated based on the review of the literature and the findings from the interview data:

$H_1$: Heterosexual women will score lower than lesbian and bisexual women on measures of feminism.

$H_2$: Heterosexual women will have higher scores in measures of body esteem, body hair removal, make-up use, and looking feminine. Bisexual women will report lower levels than heterosexual women, but higher than lesbians.

$H_3$: Lesbians will have the highest scores on the measure of recognition of sexual identity from appearance. Scores will not differ between bisexual and heterosexual women.
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Method and procedure

Measures

Based on the analysis of the qualitative interview data, and the literature review reported above, a number of measures were sourced in order to explore topics of interest in more depth. The final questionnaire was composed of a number of sections, and can be seen in Appendix 2D. The first part of the questionnaire gathered information regarding the women’s demographic data, which is reported below.

Where possible, validated scales were used, but where relevant scales did not exist, specific questions and scales were developed for the ASIQ, based on previous research. Each scale and subscale underwent a reliability analysis to ensure that the construct that was being measured was consistent across all questions, particularly important for the scales that were created specifically for this study. Cronbach’s alpha (α), the most common test of reliability, was chosen for these tests. This correlation checks variance both within the item, and the covariance across the other items in the same scale. Scores of 0.7 or above were considered statistically reliable (Field, 2005).

Feminism

The Feminism and the Women’s Movement Scale (FWM) (Fassinger, 1994) (see Appendix 7D) measures attitudes towards feminism. Participants are required to respond to statements about feminism, (e.g., ‘feminism has positively influenced relationships between men and women’) on a 5-point Likert scale (ranging from “1 = strongly disagree” to “5 = strongly agree”).

In the original scale a Cronbach’s alpha of 0.890 was found for the overall scale. In test-retest reliability (α) coefficient of 0.81 was reported. In this sample, the FWM (α) = 0.7., thus is considered a statistically reliable score (Field, 2005).

An additional question was developed specifically for this study: ‘to what extent do you consider yourself a feminist?’. This meant that the ASIQ allowed women to directly state that they were feminists, but also measured their degree of affiliation to feminism. It was hoped this would identify those women who held feminist beliefs but who chose not to identify as feminists per se. However, when this single
item was combined with the FWM scales the reliability tests were (α) = 0.75. This suggested that those who expressed feminist beliefs (measured by the FWM) had reliably agreed that they were feminists on the single item question. Therefore, the scales were combined to form one scale for the purposes of analysis.

Feelings about the body

The Body-Esteem Scale for adolescents and adults (BES) (Mendelson, Mendelson and White, 2001) is a 23 item scale of feelings about body and appearance (see Appendix 7D). Participants are required to respond to statements on a 5-point Likert scale (ranging from “0 = never” to “4 = often”). The BES contains 3 subscales. The first is ‘BE-appearance’, which asks general feelings about appearance with questions such as ‘I like what I see when I look in the mirror’. The second is the ‘BE-weight satisfaction’ subscale, which contains questions such as ‘I am satisfied with my weight’. The final subscale is ‘BE-attribution’, which is a measure of ‘evaluations attributed to others about one’s body and appearance’ (Mendelson et al., 2001:92), and asks questions such as ‘I’m as nice looking as most people’. The BES was chosen because it provided a general measure of ‘appearance’ rather than focusing only on ‘body image’ measures alone (e.g., body (dis)satisfaction and weight).

Mendelson et al., (2001) tested the reliability and validity of the BES. Convergent validity was measured against previously validated scales, and factor analysis was used to test internal consistency. For the BE-Appearance subscale (α) = 0.92, for the BE-Weight scale (α) = 0.94 and finally for the BE-Attribution subscale, (α) = 0.81. These results indicate that the BSE has good internal consistency. Finally, multiple regression analyses of sex, age and weight led the authors to conclude that the results indicate good construct and convergent validity. The authors also tested for test-retest reliability and found high stability correlations, all of which indicates that the BES is a reliable measure (Mendelson et al., 2001).

Cronbach’s alphas for the data from this study showed good reliability for both the appearance ( (α) = 0.92) and weight ((α) = 0.93) subscales, and satisfactory results for the attribution subscale ( (α) = 0.73). These results indicate that each subscale is reliably measuring the construct which it set out to measure.
Beauty practices and femininity

Body Hair Scales:

The *Women and Body Hair Scale* (Basow & Braman, 1998) was the only scale available which assessed women’s perceptions of body hair (see Appendix 2D). The scale is based on reasons given for body hair removal based on the authors’ literature review. It includes questions such as ‘body hair on women is ugly’, and uses a 5-point Likert scale (ranging from “1 = strongly agree” to “5 = strongly disagree”).

No analyses of validity or reliability have yet been conducted for the WBHS, although factor analysis had shown questionnaire cohesion of 0.88 (Basow and Braman, 1998). In the absence of an alternative scale the WBHS was used, but was edited slightly: in the question ‘women need to remove body hair in order to appeal to men’ the word ‘men’ was replaced with ‘a partner’ to remove the assumption of heterosexuality. Reliability tests were run and (\(\alpha\)) = 0.91, indicating good internal reliability.

In addition, a set of body hair questions were developed specifically for this study. This *Body Hair Alteration Scale* (BHAS) aimed to establish whether women removed *or altered* their body and facial hair, and if so from where on the body or face. This was based on the recommendation of Toerien et al. (2005) who highlighted the importance of taking into consideration hair removal and alteration by specific body location when analysing body hair practices, because they have been found to vary across different parts of the body (Toerien et al., 2005). Participants responded using a 5 item scale ranging from “1 = never” to “5 = always”. All questions started with ‘Do you remove (i.e., pluck, shave, wax etc) and/or alter (i.e., remove some of, bleach, etc)...’ (see Appendix 2D), and then asked about different parts of the body:

1. your armpit hair?
2. the hair on your legs?
3. your eyebrows?
4. other facial hair?
5. your bikini line?

This scale was reliable, Cronbach’s alpha (\(\alpha\)) = 0.79.
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Make-up Scale:

No existing questionnaires assessing make-up use were identified, so 3 questions were developed. The Beliefs about Make-up Scale (BAMUS) was based on items in the WBHS, both in question phrasing, and in the response format (a 7 point Likert scale, ranging from “1 = disagree strongly” to “7 = agree strongly”). The items were:

1. Women look fine without make-up
2. Women who don’t wear make-up should receive social disapproval
3. Make-up on women is attractive

These questions were intended to form a single measure. However, the scale showed poor reliability (Cronbach’s alpha (α) = 0.35). Therefore, Pearson’s Correlation was used in order to measure the relationship between two of the make-up questions at a time. However, these showed at best only a medium positive correlation. Due to these poor results these questions could only be used as single items.

Femininity Scale:

The Engagement with Feminine Appearance Scale (EFAS) was developed in order to ask women about the ‘other ways’ in which they changed their appearance. It was decided to consider dress and hair in this scale, which was focused on femininity in relation to appearance. Participants were asked to respond to the following six items on a 7 item scale (ranging from “1 = never” to “7 = always”):

1. I like to wear feminine clothing
2. I prefer my hair when it is longer
3. People would often describe me as being girly in how I look
4. I would be very surprised if I were to be mistaken for a man
5. I would never wear a skirt or dress
6. It is important to me to look feminine

Results showed good reliability: Cronbach’s alpha (α) = 0.73.
Recognition Scale:

Recognition of sexual identity through appearance was considered to be a particularly important area to investigate, but had never been researched through quantitative scales. Therefore, the five item Recognition of Sexual Identity through Appearance Scale (RSIAS) was developed based on existing social science literature. All participants were asked to respond to 5 items on a 7 point Likert scale ranging from “1 = disagree strongly” to “7 = agree strongly”:

1. It is important to me that others are able to tell my sexuality from the way I look
2. I can signal my sexual identity to others by wearing certain clothes
3. I’d be offended if someone thought I was LGB based on my appearance
4. My appearance is useful in signalling my sexuality to others
5. I don’t think that people can tell my sexuality from my appearance

The scale had good reliability (Cronbach’s alpha (α) = 0.74).

Recruitment

Participants were recruited through purposive and snowball sampling, with the aim of recruiting a large and varied sample of participants from a range of backgrounds (e.g., older/younger, community involved/socially isolated, white/non-white, educated/less educated etc). I chose to use recruitment methods which are commonly recognised within LGBTQ research, in order to gain a large and diverse sample (see, for example, Fish, 1999; Harding & Peel, 2007; Rothblum, 2007), as well as methods which would allow recruitment of some heterosexual women. The first wave of recruitment used paper copies of the ASIQ, handed out at Birmingham LGBT Pride in May 2008. After the Internet version was developed, flyers were distributed at Pride London in July 2008 (see Appendix 2A). The next strategy used the social networking website Facebook and in September 2008, a group entitled Appearance Research Needs You was created and all personal contacts were invited to join. These contacts were also asked to invite others to join the group and take part in the survey. In the same month an email was sent to listservs (e.g., jiscmail),

153 None of which were returned.
including the Lesbian and Gay Section\textsuperscript{154} of the British Psychological Society (BPS), the Critical Sexology group and the Bi Research Group. In October 2008 adverts were placed in Venue (a local magazine) and the Big Issue (South West edition).

\textbf{Procedure}

Ethical approval was granted by UWE Health and Life Sciences Ethics Committee (HLS07-607), and included allowing participants to enter into a £50 prize draw as an incentive to take part. The questionnaire was placed online, (using UWE's questionnaire software) and participants were first presented with a welcome page which included information about the study (see Appendix 2B). Participants could only answer the questions after they had ticked a box to confirm their consent (see Appendix 2C). Participants did not have to provide their names to take part. However, at the end, a page appeared which thanked them, debriefed them, and offered them the option to be involved in further research, and be entered into the prize draw (see Appendix 2E). This did require their name and email address, which were kept in a password protected spreadsheet. Data from the questionnaire was exported from the UWE survey creator to an excel file, and then transferred to SPSS ready for analysis.

\textbf{Exclusion criteria}

Four participants under the age of 18 had taken part; for ethical reasons their data was removed because BPS guidelines indicate that to include participants under the age of 18, parental consent is required (www.bps.org.uk). Some participants had responded to the demographic question which asked them their gender, with an answer which described their sexual identity (e.g., 'lesbian'). These responses were considered ambiguous and the data of these respondents was deleted.

One male to female (MTF) transgender woman filled out the questionnaire, one participant described themselves as 'gender dysphoric', and one participant defined themselves as 'androgyrous'. It was my intention to be inclusive of trans people, but unfortunately there were not enough respondents in these categories to analyse their results separately, which had been the original intention. However, these respondents’ data may have been different from those who identified as 'female', and so their results could not be included with the main data set either.

\textsuperscript{154} The Lesbian and Gay Section of the BPS has since changed its name to the Psychology of Sexualities Section.
Therefore, these respondents' data had to be deleted. This was a disappointment, and it is recommended that future research includes trans people by using purposive recruitment strategies.

A decision was made to remove any participants who did not complete the demographic information, but anyone who completed these and started filling out the questionnaire itself was considered to have provided meaningful data. Therefore their responses were retained even if they did not complete the entire survey. This is reflected in the results section and accounts for the missing values figures for some of the measures, particularly those placed later in the questionnaire. Recruitment was extremely successful, and even after removal of non-responses 494 participants remained.
Demographics

All participants whose data were included described their gender as female. There was an age range of 18 to 67 with a mean age of 33\textsuperscript{155}. Participant sexual identity is shown in the table below:

Table 8.4: Sexuality of participants:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sexuality</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
<td>268</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesbian</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bisexual</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-heterosexual</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The 226 participants who identified as lesbian, bisexual or non-heterosexual were asked additional questions about their sexuality. They were asked at what age they first started identifying with a non-heterosexual (e.g., lesbian, bisexual or non-heterosexual) identity. Using this figure, and their age, the number of years that participants had identified with their current sexuality was calculated. It was possible to calculate this (i.e., participants had answered both ‘age’ and ‘age first identified as non-heterosexual’) for 218 of the participants. The period that they had identified as non-heterosexual ranged from 1 year to 48 years with a mean of 16 years. Non-heterosexual participants were also asked how ‘out’ they were about their sexuality and were given the response options shown in the results table below:

Table 8.5: ‘Outness’ of non-heterosexual participants:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How out?</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very out</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mostly out</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not very out</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{155} I report these demographic details to convey a picture of the sample. It was beyond the scope of this thesis to explore in depth the Information on age, race, ethnicity, social class, employment and education. A future analysis of this data which incorporated these factors could be beneficial.
Of the 492 participants who responded to the open-ended question asking about race/ethnic background, 95% (468) of them were white. Participants were asked the open ended question ‘what country do you currently live in?’ Four hundred and sixty-eight participants answered, which revealed that 94% (439) were in the United Kingdom, 2% (10) were in Ireland, 2% (10) were in the U.S. and <1% (3) were in Canada. The remaining locations (<1% for each) were Germany, India, New Zealand and Australia.

Participants were given the following 4 responses to choose from in order to describe where they live: of the 489 participants who answered, 54% (265) lived in an ‘urban-city’, 21% (101) lived in an ‘urban-town’, 16% (76) described their area as a ‘rural-town’, and the remaining 10% (47) described their home as a ‘rural-village’.

The open ended responses to the social class question were coded into the following three categories: of the 461 participants that answered, 77% (353) identified themselves as ‘middle’ class, 29% (94) identified as ‘working/lower class’, and 3% (14) as ‘upper’ class.

Out of the 488 participants who answered the yes/no question regarding disability, 6% (29) responded ‘yes’. Their conditions were agoraphobia, Ankylosing spondylitis arthritis, Asperger’s syndrome, asthma, blindness (partial), chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), chronic fatigue syndrome, chronic pain sufferer, deafness, diabetes, depression/clinical depression, endometriosis, mental health conditions/difficulties, heart condition, mobility impaired, obsessive compulsive disorder, and spinal injuries. For most of these conditions it was not anticipated that they would significantly impact upon measures of appearance. However, for some (e.g., arthritis, diabetes, and mobility impairment) it is possible that they could. However, the sample size was large enough that an effect on the overall data would be minimal.

Other than these conditions, one participant also had what they described as ‘severe disfigurement’. It could be hypothesised that this might potentially influence how they responded to questions about appearance. However the decision was made not to exclude them, because research has concluded that those with visible differences (or ‘disfigurements’) in how they look do not necessarily
differ in their body image and levels of (dis)satisfaction compared to the wider population (e.g., Rumsey & Harcourt, 2005; Rumsey, 2002).

The educational level/qualifications question was phrased ‘which of the following qualifications do you have/ are you studying towards’? The results of the 486 participants who responded show that the sample was highly educated:

Table 8.6: Participant educational level/qualifications:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Highest qualification</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Postgraduate</td>
<td>189</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree</td>
<td>178</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GCSE/O Level</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HNC/Professional</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Levels</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The majority of the 486 participants who responded to the question about employment were in full time paid/self employment. The results can be seen in the table below:

Table 8.7: Participant employment status:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employment status</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In paid employment</td>
<td>330</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full time student</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working and studying</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part-time student</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other(^{156})</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{156}\) Those placed in the category of ‘other’ were retired, voluntary workers, on a gap year, or mothers/’housewives’. 

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In terms of relationship status, of the 492 participants who responded, 68% (334) were in a relationship, and 32% (158) were single. If participants described themselves as in a relationship, they were asked about the gender of their partner(s). Of those 334 in a relationship, 332 responded to this question, of which 67% (221) were with a man, 29% (96) with a woman, and 5% (15) with more than one partner. In relation specifically to bisexual women, 30 were single, 31 were with a man, 11 with a woman, and 12 were with more than one partner, and one woman had chosen not to answer.

They were also asked whether they defined their relationship as casual, long-term, cohabiting, or legally recognised. This question was answered by 326 participants, of whom 38% (123) were cohabiting, 29% (95) were in a legally recognised relationship, 28% (92) were in a long-term relationship, and 5% (16) were in a casual relationship. In answer to the question, do you have any children, 78% (384) out of the 493 who responded replied ‘no’.

Participants were asked for information on their height, weight, and dress size, which were converted to centimetres, kilograms, and U.K. dress size respectively. This allowed Body Mass Index (BMI) to be calculated.

Critical academic psychologists have argued that the idealisation of women’s body size has gone beyond the aesthetics of the ‘beauty ideal’, and that there has been a move towards the cultural stigmatisation of larger women particularly through the (so-called) ‘obesity epidemic’ and the associated (alleged) health and financial implications (see, for example, Tischner & Malson, 2008). Some epidemiologists have argued that high BMI figures may be misleading. They challenge the evidence that associates high BMI as an indicator of poor health and/or lowered life expectancy (e.g., Cogan & Ernsberger, 1999, Campos, Sagu, Ernsberger, Oliver & Gaesser, 2006). Hence it is critical to make clear that the BMI figures were purely used in order ensure that the data did not contain either a high number of extremely large or extremely small participants. No assumptions were made that BMI was an indicator of health or wellbeing. A total of 473 (out of 494) participants had provided enough information in order for BMI to be calculated. BMI ranged from 16 to 55 with a mean of 25. These results and the histogram (see Appendix 2F) show that there were an appropriately wide range of responses.
Results

Preliminary analysis

Before analysing the data for significant differences between dependent variables it was necessary to establish whether the dataset was robust and normally distributed, and therefore suitable for parametric analysis. A number of visual checks and tests of normality were conducted. First, the means and trimmed means were examined (see Appendix 2G). Next, descriptives, and Kolmogorov-Smirnov tests (see Appendix 2H) were used to check the normal distribution of scores in the data. Additionally, histograms with normal distribution curves (see Appendix 2I), normal probability plots (see Appendix 2J), detrended normal Q-Q plots (see Appendix 2K), and box plots (see Appendix 2L) were used to visually check the data. (Details of the reasoning behind each of these tests of normal distribution can also be seen Appendices 2G-2L). The box plots indicated that there were outliers in the data, hence a Mahalanobis test (see Appendix 2M), was also used. Overall, the results of these tests indicated that there were no extremities in the data, and that it was normally distributed. Therefore, it was concluded that the data was appropriate for parametric analysis.

Parametric tests

Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) tests and Analysis of Variance (ANOVAs) were utilised to ascertain whether there were significant differences in study variables according to sexual identities. When conducting parametric tests, it is important to consider the risk of Type 1 (inappropriately rejecting the null hypothesis) or Type 2 error (inappropriately accepting the null hypothesis). To minimise this risk, and to ensure that the correct conclusions are drawn about differences between groups, there are three key interrelated considerations to make. The first is the effect size of the tests, which are indicated as part of the analysis of variance tests through the eta squared ($\eta^2$) figure. An $\eta^2$ value of 0.01 indicates a small effect, 0.06 a moderate effect, and 0.14 a large effect. The second consideration is the alpha ($\alpha$) level of the test, for which the standard probability level of 0.05, commonly considered appropriate within psychology, was chosen. The final consideration is the sample size. In this study, the size of the each individual group, and of the overall sample, was large. All of these aspects affect the power of
the test, and its ability to accurately detect an effect (Pallant, 2002; Field, 2005). There are tests which can be used to ascertain the power of statistical tests, however, it was decided that a separate power test was not required. This was because a study with over 100 participants constitutes a large enough sample that power is ‘not an issue’, and therefore the power of the parametric tests will be sufficient, without any need of any additional tests of power to check (Stevens, 1992:6; Pallant, 2002:173).

Age/BMI

ANOVA\(s\) were used to establish whether there was a significant difference between the mean ages or BMI scores for the women in each sexual identity group. If there were, it would be important to control for these in all subsequent tests to ensure that were not affecting the results.

A one-way ANOVA established there were no significant differences between the age (\(F(2, 467)=2.56, p=0.079, p>0.05\)) or BMI scores (\(F(2, 450)=0.90, p=0.406, p>0.05\)). Consequently, subsequent tests would not need to take these into consideration as they would not be contributing to any significant differences between the groups of women.

Feminism

The first parametric test established whether affiliation to feminism differed according to sexuality\(^{157}\). A between groups ANOVA was conducted in order to compare scores on the combined feminist scales in order to see if there were significant differences according to the women’s sexual identity. As in each of the subsequent tests, the independent variables (IVs) were the sexual identities of the women (bisexual, lesbian, and heterosexual) and the dependent variables (DV\(\)s) were results on each of the scales/subscales – in this case results on the FWM and Feminist Single Item combined. Overall, there was a statistically significant main effect of sexual identity (\(F(2, 468)=11.16, p=0.00, p<0.001\)).

The descriptive (see Appendix 2H) and Bonferroni post hoc tests (see Appendix 2N) for the feminist scales indicated that both bisexual women (\(p<.01\)) and lesbians

\(^{157}\)A sample size of at least 20 is required for statistical analysis in order to ensure ‘robustness’ (Pallant, 2002). For some scales the number of participants in the non-heterosexual group had dropped to below 20, and therefore they had to be removed from further analysis.
(p<0.001) scored more highly than heterosexual women. There was no significant
difference in scores between bisexual and lesbian women (p>0.05).

These tests established that there were significant differences between groups for
their scores on the feminist scales. Therefore any other differences between the
women may be explained by their feminist beliefs. Accordingly all subsequent
significant analysis were rerun in order to control for feminism. In accordance with
the results of the reliability tests reported above (FWM Cronbach’s alpha (α) = 0.7,
combined feminist single item and FWM scales Cronbach’s alpha (α) = 0.75) these
scales were combined and used as the control/covariate.

Body Esteem

A summary of the descriptives of the Body Esteem Scale (BES) can be seen in
Appendix 2H. A three way MANOVA was conducted in order to compare scores on
each subscale (BE-appearance, BE-attribution and BE-weight). There were no
statistically significant differences between the scores, as shown by the results of
the MANOVA which were, Wilksλ = (0.977), F(2, 463), F = 1.78, p=1.00, p>0.05
η² = 0.011. This indicates that general feelings towards appearance, beliefs about
others’ attributions about appearance, and weight satisfaction did not differ
according to sexual identity.

Beauty practices and femininity

Body Hair:

MANOVA to examine results of the body hair scales was performed and there was a
significant difference according to sexual identity of Wilks λ = 0.912, F(2, 447), F =
10.477, p=0.00, p<0.001 η² = 0.045. As outlined above, because the results showed a
significant main effect the combined feminism scales were added as a covariate
(MANCOVA), however the main effect remained significant (Wilksλ = (0.940), F(2,
446), F = 7.00, p=0.000, p<0.001 η²=0.31). Considering the results for the individual
scales, there was a significant difference for the WBHS, F(2, 445)=10.615, p=0.000,
p<0.001, η²=0.046, and for the BHAS F(2,445)=10.471, p=0.000, p<0.001, η²=0.045.

The descriptive statistics (see Appendix 2H) and the post hoc tests (see Appendix
2N) indicated that the significant differences lay between bisexual and heterosexual
women’s scores (WBHS p<.01, BHAS p<.01) and between lesbian and heterosexual
women (WBHS $p<0.01$, BHAS $p<0.01$). Lesbian and bisexual women's higher scores on the *Women and the Body Hair Scale* indicate that they held more tolerant attitudes towards body hair. The lesbian and bisexual women's higher scores on the *Body Hair Alteration Scale* indicated that they engage less in body hair alteration (e.g., bleaching) or removal.

A second MANOVA was performed on the individual items of the *BHAS* to identify specifically where on the body differences in hair removal practice lay (Wilks$\lambda$ = 0.892, $F(2, 443)$, $F = 10.477$, $p=0.00$, $p<0.001$ $\eta^2=0.056$). This significant main effect remained after a MANCOVA to control for feminism (Wilks$\lambda$ = 0.901, $F(2, 442)$, $F = 4.655$, $p=0.00$, $p<0.001$ $\eta^2=0.051$). Results show that the differences lay in how often they removed or altered body hair from their armpits ($F(2, 441)= 6.557$, $p=0.02$, $p<0.05$, $\eta^2=0.029$) and their legs ($F(2, 441)= 11.092$, $p=0.00$, $p<0.01$, $\eta^2=0.048$). In terms of facial hair, there was a significant difference between the altering of eyebrow hair ($F(2, 441)= 15.744$, $p=0.00$, $p<0.01$, $\eta^2=0.067$ ($p<.01$) but no significant differences between the alteration of other facial hair ($F(2, 441)= 0.482$, $p=0.618$, $p>0.05$, $\eta^2=0.002$). There were no significant differences between the groups in removal of hair from the bikini line ($F(2, 441)= 2.153$, $p=0.117$, $p>0.05$, $\eta^2=0.010$) which had been significant before feminism was controlled for ($F(2, 443)= 4.673$, $p=0.010$, $p=0.01$, $\eta^2=0.021$). This suggests that differences could have been explained by their feminist beliefs, rather than their sexual identity. This was tested using Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient, the results of which were a small positive correlation between the 2 variables ($r = -0.209$, $n=449$, $p<0.01$), whereby women who scored more highly on the feminism scales also had higher scores on the question about their bikini line. Higher scores on this scale indicated less frequent alteration of hair and therefore these findings show that women with higher affiliation to feminist beliefs were also less likely to alter or remove their bikini line hair.

The descriptive statistics (see *Appendix 2H*) for each item in the *BHAS* and the post hoc tests (see *Appendix 2N*) demonstrated that the pattern followed that of the previous significant differences, whereby bisexual ($p<0.05$) and lesbian ($p<0.01$) women were less likely to remove or alter their armpit hair than heterosexual women. Similarly, bisexual ($p<0.01$) and lesbian ($p<0.01$) women reported less investment in the removal or alteration of leg hair than heterosexual women. In
terms of women and their eyebrow hair, the pattern continued whereby bisexual (p<0.01) and lesbian (p<0.01) women were significantly less likely to alter their eyebrows.

Make-up:

Due to the poor reliability results the make-up items were tested as single items rather than as a scale. MANOVA was performed and showed a significant main effect (Wilks\(\lambda\) = 0.810), \(F(2, 440)\), \(F = 16.227\), \(p = 0.00\), \(p<0.01\) \(\eta^2 = 0.100\) which remained when feminism was controlled (Wilks\(\lambda\) = 0.824), \(F(3, 438)\), \(F = 14.73\), \(p = 0.00\), \(p<0.001\) \(\eta^2 = 0.092\). The univariate results showed significant differences between groups for ‘how often do you wear make-up’ (\(F(2, 438) = 43.737\), \(p = 0.00\), \(p<0.01\), \(\eta^2 = 0.166\)) and the statement ‘make-up on women is attractive’ (\(F(2, 438) = 12.987\), \(p = 0.00\), \(p<0.01\), \(\eta^2 = 0.056\)). However, there was no significant difference for the statement ‘women look fine without make-up’ (\(F(2, 438) = 2.983\), \(p = 0.05\), \(p>0.05\), \(\eta^2 = 0.013\)). Because there had been a significant difference on the ‘make-up on women is attractive’ statement before feminism was controlled for (\(F(2, 440) = 5.587\), \(p = 0.004\), \(p<0.005\), \(\eta^2 = 0.025\)) this suggests that differences could have been explained by their feminist beliefs, rather than their sexuality. In order to test this theory the correlation between the item ‘make-up on women is attractive’ and the feminism scales were tested using Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient. There was a small negative correlation between the 2 variables (\(r = -0.17\), \(n = 449\), \(p<0.01\)), whereby higher scores on the feminism scales were associated with lower beliefs that make-up on women looks attractive. Although only small this, combined with the MANOVA results, suggests that feminist beliefs affected the results to a greater extent than sexual identity.

Descriptive statistics (see Appendix 2H) and post hoc test (see Appendix 2N) identified where differences lay for each of the questions. There were significant differences between all the groups in how frequently the women reported they wore make-up. Heterosexual women reported that they wore make-up more frequently than bisexual (p<0.001) and lesbian (p<0.001) women. Bisexual women reported that they wore make-up significantly more frequently than lesbians (p<0.05). These results show that lesbians wore make-up the least often, heterosexual women the most often, and bisexual women in between.
Part Three

Chapter Eight: Appearance and Sexual Identity Questionnaire (ASIQ)

Feminine Appearance Scale and Recognition Scales:

A three way MANOVA to examine results of EFAS and RSIAS scales was performed and showed a significant main effect of sexuality, Wilks\(\lambda = 0.762\), \(F(2, 440) = 32.02, p = 0.00, p < 0.001, \eta^2 = 0.127\) which remained significant after feminism was controlled (Wilks\(\lambda = 0.779\), \(F(2, 439) = 29.11, p = 0.00, p < 0.001, \eta^2 = 0.118\)). The univariate main effect for EFAS were significant \(F(2, 438) = 41.450, p = 0.000, p < 0.001, \eta^2 = 0.159\) as was the main effect on RSIAS results \(F(2, 438) = 16.412, p = 0.000, p < 0.001, \eta^2 = 0.070\).

The descriptive statistics for the EFAS and RSIAS (see Appendix 2H) and post hoc tests (see Appendix 2N) showed that for EFAS there were significant differences between all groups. The heterosexual women scored more highly than either bisexual \((p < 0.001)\) or lesbian \((p < 0.001)\) women which indicated that they were the most invested in ‘looking feminine’. Although bisexual women’s scores were lower than heterosexual women, they still scored significantly higher scores than lesbians \((p < 0.001)\) who were the least invested in ‘feminine appearance’.

For the Recognition of Sexual Identity through Appearance Scale (RSIAS) lesbians had significantly higher scores than both heterosexual \((p < 0.001)\) and bisexual women \((p < 0.001)\). Higher scores on this scale indicate beliefs that it was both possible and important that other people could tell their sexuality from their appearance. Therefore the results indicate that lesbians have the strongest belief that they can signal their sexuality to others through their appearance, and that this is important to them.
Part Three

Chapter Eight: Appearance and Sexual Identity Questionnaire (ASIQ)

Discussion

Feminism

This study has demonstrated that the traditional associations between sexual identity and feminist beliefs remain pertinent among these predominantly well educated, white, middle class British women. Lesbian and bisexual women held stronger feminist beliefs than heterosexual women, and this may reflect that the historical links between lesbianism and feminism remain intact. Bisexual women scored only slightly lower scores on feminist measures than lesbians, and the non-significant difference between the two groups may be a reflection that as non-heterosexual women they have both become aware of the possibilities of resisting normative mainstream beliefs about society. In not subscribing to ‘normative’ sexuality, they are forced to question their place within patriarchal society which dictates heterosexuality. In doing so they may become aware of other challenges to patriarchal society, of which feminism is one. Both this and the potential for them to associate with lesbian cultures may offer an explanation of their affiliation to feminist beliefs. These findings clearly support the first hypothesis that heterosexual women would score lower than lesbian and bisexual women in measures of feminism.

Body Esteem

There were no significant differences between groups for any of the subscales of the Body Esteem Scale. This leads to a rejection of the hypothesis that heterosexual women would have significantly higher scores on measures of body esteem, lesbians the lowest scores and bisexual women somewhere in the middle. However, the lack of significant differences between any of the sexual identity groups indicates that factors other than the male gaze lead women to be similarly concerned with their bodies and their appearance. Therefore the findings of this research support Dworkin’s (1989) theory that all women are subject to similar cultural influence on their appearance and bodies. This also confirms some previous quantitative (e.g., Heffernan, 1996; Beren et al., 1996) and qualitative findings (e.g., Myers et al. 1999), which has showed that lesbians, and in this study bisexual women too, are affected by appearance norms just as heterosexual women are, possibly because they are so ingrained within (patriarchal) culture. This research
Part Three

Chapter Eight: Appearance and Sexual Identity Questionnaire (ASIQ)

was able to make a clear contribution by purposively sampling in such a way that
the group of bisexual women was large enough to analyse as a distinct group. They
did not score significantly differently from the other women, which suggests that
bisexual, lesbian and heterosexual women all have similar feelings around their
‘body esteem’.

*Beauty practices and femininity*

Body hair:

In terms of body hair heterosexual women agreed significantly more than lesbian or
bisexual women with those statements on the WBHS that described body hair as
disgusting, uncomfortable, unfeminine and unattractive. Lesbian and bisexual
women had more positive attitudes towards body hair and accordingly their
reported behaviours on the BHAS showed that they were less likely to remove hair
from their underarms, legs, or eyebrows.

However, when it came to facial hair and the bikini line there were no significant
differences between the groups. For facial hair the mean scores lay at the midpoint
of the scale and suggest that most of the women answered between ‘sometimes’ or
‘rarely’ with regard to how often they removed or altered facial hair. It is possible
that women score similarly here because the face is such a visible part of the body,
or that women commonly understand facial hair as unattractive. For the bikini line,
the mean scores suggest that all the women remove hair from this area
‘sometimes’. Feminist beliefs contributed to the removal or alteration of bikini line
hair: there was a significant difference between the groups before feminism was
controlled for, and as scores on the feminism scale increased, alteration of bikini
line hair decreased. Previous findings had been mixed and sometimes (necessarily)
complex in their interpretations (e.g., Basow, 1991; Tiggeman & Kenyon, 1998).

There has been a recent cultural shift towards a re-emergence of feminism^158^, which
could mean that research about young women’s body hair practices may be
particularly pertinent aspect of appearance to consider in the future.

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^158^This re-emergence has largely been brought about through the ease of communication/
group formation through the internet, and social networking sites. This ‘new wave’ of feminist
networks in major U.K. cities such as Bristol (www.bristolfeministnetwork.com), London
(www.ldnfeministnetwork.ik.com) and Edinburgh
(http://edinburghfeministnetwork.wordpress.com) has yet to have been discussed
academically. This ‘reawakening’ of feminism may impact upon young women’s understandings
of their bodies.
The differing results across parts of the body validates Toerien et al.’s (2005) observations that specificity in body location is an important factor when analysing body hair practices. The main finding that lesbian and bisexual women differ from heterosexual women in their practices may be a reflection of their resistance to the gender norms, of which body hair is a part (Basow, 1991; Tiggeman & Kenyon, 1998). The bisexual and lesbian women were less focused on maintaining the hairlessness norm and this may tie in with their sexuality having led them to question patriarchal norms around women’s bodily appearance. Lesbians (and results suggest bisexual women too) may wish to reject and resist such gender norms (e.g., Blackman & Perry, 1990), and these findings signal that the obligation to remove or alter body hair remains associated with heterosexuality and attractiveness to men, hence supporting the results of previous research such as Basow (1991).

In this study, the hypothesis made about body hair had to be partially rejected as it was predicted that bisexual women would have more engagement with body hair removal than lesbians due to the potential for them to wish to appeal to men (and therefore fit the societal ‘requirements’ of doing so). On the whole this idea was not supported. Instead the body hair beliefs and practices of bisexual women were not found to be significantly different from those of lesbians. It would seem that both lesbian and bisexual women may resist adhering to traditional body hair practices. This may be a way of resisting patriarchal norms, and in turn expressing their sexual identity. However, while this may lead to them feeling a sense of empowerment, the heterosexual women’s responses to the WBHS suggest that the negative connotations of body hair are still upheld within the U.K. Therefore, lesbians and bisexual women may still have to deal with the stigma highlighted in previous research, to which women with body hair are subjected (e.g., Basow & Braman, 1998; Kitzinger & Wilmott, 2002; Toerien & Wilkinson, 2003; Toerien & Wilkinson, 2004).

Make-up:

Due to the poor reliability of the scale used in this study, items could only be examined individually. In terms of the frequency of make-up use, this aspect of $H^2$ could be accepted as heterosexual women wore make-up significantly most often, lesbians the least often and bisexual women in between these 2 groups.
However, for the other 2 items, this hypothesis could not be upheld. There was no significant difference between the groups for the statement ‘women look fine without make-up’. The mean scores indicated that women answered towards the ‘slightly disagree’ point of the scale. Finally, once feminism had been controlled for, there were no significant differences between responses to the item ‘make-up on women is attractive’. Due to these results and the correlation between this item and feminist beliefs, the conclusion drawn is that feminism has a greater effect on whether or not women perceive that make-up looks attractive on women. Therefore, the hypothesis could only be accepted specifically for make-up use, and not for beliefs about make-up.

In sum, the lesbians used make-up less and considered it less attractive on other women than bisexual or heterosexual women did. This offers some support for previous findings that lesbians recognise make-up as a reflection of heterosexual practice (Dellinger & Williams, 1997), and accordingly reject it in their behaviour. This may mean that lesbians will be evaluated by both men, and other women, as less attractive (Cash et al., 1989; Mulhern et al., 2003), less confident and less happy, and as a result may be less valued in the work place (Nash et al., 2006). Conversely they may also be considered more competent and professional as a result of lesser make-up use (Johnson & Lewis, 1988; Workman & Johnson, 1991; Kyle & Mahler, 1996; Huguet et al., 2004).

Feminine Appearance:

For the EFAS, the hypothesis that heterosexual women would be the most concerned with femininity, lesbians the least concerned and bisexual women somewhere in between was accepted. In summary, all scales that measured appearance practices that are related to ‘femininity’ indicated that lesbians are less likely to engage in such behaviours. This suggests that lesbians continue to resist heterosexual beauty norms, despite the emergence of the ‘lipstick lesbian’. This may also mean that they are visible through their ‘difference’ from heterosexual women.

All these findings around body hair and femininity are particularly interesting in light of the themes which arose from the interviews with bisexual women. Some of the bisexual women associated make-up, body hair removal, and femininity with
heterosexuality. Conversely they considered a lack of make-up, hairy bodies and masculinity to be associated with a (particular) lesbian look. They had positioned bisexuality as situated between these two (girly /butch) visual identities and these findings mirror those suggested in the findings of the interviews.

Recognition Scales:

For the RSIAS lesbians reported the significantly highest scores which indicates that they agreed (and valued the idea) that sexuality could be expressed through appearance to a greater extent than heterosexual or bisexual women. Therefore the results also imply that lesbians are ‘less invested’ in their appearance, which might imply a potential for them to have higher self-esteem and be protected against body dissatisfaction and subsequent eating disorders (Cash et al., 2004). However, this contradicts the same women’s scores on the BES which were not significantly different, hence it may be that lesbians are ‘invested’ in their appearance in ways which differ from heterosexual women, especially if they create or adhere to particular lesbian looks. Future research would be beneficial in unpicking the complexities apparent here.

Another important feature of the RSIAS was that, as predicted, the bisexual women had the lowest scores. Their mean scores suggest that they did not believe they were able to express their sexual identity through how they look. This offers clear support for both the previous research that has discussed the invisibility of bisexuality, and the findings from the interviews, in which bisexual women saw bisexual visual identity as largely non-existent.
Conclusion

The main aim of this study was to explore bisexual women’s appearance related behaviours to consider whether bisexual women’s appearance practices, and feelings about their bodies, made them distinct from heterosexual and lesbian women. If they did, then this could indicate that as individuals they have their own sense of visual identity, which they also share with other bisexual women, hence is related to their sexuality.

In summary, bisexual women did not differ in their body esteem from either heterosexual or lesbian women. In their body hair practices they were similar to lesbians, and in the frequency of their make-up use they fell between heterosexual women and lesbian women, as they did in their results on the femininity scale. This suggests that although bisexual women do not always have distinct appearance practices, they do appear to often score in between (e.g., in the middle) of lesbian and heterosexual women. However, this position in the middle was seemingly not one which gained the women a sense of individual visual identity. This was apparent in the scores on the recognition scale, where bisexual women scored the lowest, indicating that they did not believe that they could signal their sexual identity, or have it read by others, through their dress and appearance.

The ASIQ has contributed to the literature in identifying just how important it is to consider bisexual, lesbian, and heterosexual women’s scores independently, as sexual identity played a complex part in these results. In many of these scales, there were differences in bisexual women’s scores compared to either lesbian and/or heterosexual women’s scores. Sometimes, bisexual women’s scores were similar to heterosexual women, and at other times they were similar to lesbian’s scores. This offers support for the notion that bisexual women are a category distinct from either lesbian or heterosexual women. Therefore, it is not appropriate for future research to continue amalgamating them, or removing them from the data set, and instead special efforts must be made to purposively recruit enough participants to be inclusive\(^\text{159}\). Instead, it is critical that future research acknowledges bisexual women as a category in their own right, in order that the experiences and needs of bisexual women can be better understood. Critically, the merging of bisexual

\(^{159}\) I was disappointed that I did not succeed at doing so for trans women in this study. This offered me the opportunity to reflect on how easily smaller groups can be eliminated, and how important it is to specifically plan for how such groups will be actively included.
women into other sexual identities for the sake of analysis invisibilises bisexual women. It also has the potential to invalidate the data in other sexual identity groups if bisexual women are added inappropriately.

As outlined in the literature review, women’s engagement in time consuming and sometimes costly appearance practices are theorised to be in the interests of men, and it would have been useful to compare results between bisexual women according to the gender of their current partner. However, this was not possible because of the size of the subgroups, which would have resulted in group sizes too small for statistical tests. Previous authors have not taken into consideration the gender of bisexual women’s current partner. However, the difference between heterosexual and lesbian women’s scores could sometimes be attributed to heterosexual women’s ‘interest’ in men’s gaze, which some of the bisexual women may share. Considering results by relationship status (e.g., by both whether women are single, or by what gender their current partner is) as well as by sexual identity is an important area for future research to consider and would require larger samples of bisexual women. Overall this research highlights the need for more research into the specificities of bisexual women’s appearance and related topics. Such research has the potential to unravel the multiple ways in which women understand and manage their appearance, not only according to how they identify but also who their relationship is with.

Although a large number of women took part in the ASIQ, this does not mean that any assumptions can be made about the representativeness of the sample. The women who took part in this questionnaire had a diverse age range, from 18 to 67, but it was clear that some groups were over-represented. Most (77%) of the women were middle-class, living in urban locations (75%), and defined themselves as in a (or multiple) relationship(s) (68%). Over 90% of the participants were able bodied (94%), white (95%), and living in the UK (94%). Further, the sample consisted mainly of women who were educated to degree level or higher (76%) and were in paid employment (68%). These characteristics may have been partly attributable to the use of the Internet, because the sample is likely to contain mainly women who are comfortable using computers, and who have regular access to the World Wide Web (see a broader discussion of this in Harding & Peel, 2007).
In relation to sexual identity, recent analyses of a number of population based surveys indicate that the percentage of people who identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual varies, with estimations of between 1.2% and 5.6%, dependent on the country, and which report is consulted (see, Gates, 2011). A recent report based upon an Integrated Household Survey (IHS)\textsuperscript{160} conducted by the U.K. Office for National Statistics (Joloza, Evans, O’Brien & Potter-Collins, 2010) indicated that 94% of the respondents were heterosexual, and only 1.4% lesbian, gay, or bisexual (made up of 0.9% lesbian or gay and 0.5% bisexual). However, in the current study only 57% of the sample identified themselves as heterosexual, and 43% of participants were lesbian or bisexual (25% lesbians, 18% bisexual women). It is clear that the data in the ASiQ sample does not mirror the general population. This is unsurprising in light of the purposive sampling techniques which were chosen with the aim of including a large number of lesbian and bisexual women, and indicates that this aim was well met. However, in conclusion, the findings of this questionnaire cannot be said to be representative of, or be generalised to, the wider population. Instead, what has been captured are the differences between this specific group of (mainly white, middle-class, well educated) bisexual, lesbian and heterosexual women.

It is clear that there were limitations to the sample (despite a range of recruitment strategies) in that it attracted the ‘usual suspects’ (of white, middle class and well-educated participants) to take part. Further research would benefit from purposive sampling which targeted a range of women from backgrounds other than white, educated and middle-class. These findings make a valuable contribution, which future research can build upon in order to further unpick the way in which bisexual women’s understandings of visual identity and identity more widely may differ from both heterosexual and lesbian women’s.

\textsuperscript{160} The IHS combined answers from a range of surveys to create a larger database of estimates of National Statistics. It was conducted all over the U.K., and the most recent reported statistics were based on over 450,000 participants. However, the figures are obtained from only a sample of the population, and may be subject to bias and errors (Joloza, Evans, O’Brien & Potter-Collins, 2010).
“Never judge a book by its cover”?:
Students’ understandings of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and heterosexual appearance

This chapter reports upon an inductive thematic analysis of qualitative survey data gathered from a large sample (176), of (mainly heterosexual and female) university undergraduate psychology students, aged between eighteen and twenty-three.

University students were a particularly interesting group to survey. Younger students in particular are at a life stage where they have moved away from home for the first time, and are therefore likely to be creating and building their own identities (Ellis, 2009). It is possible that participants’ accounts may reflect the commonly available ways of thinking about sexual identity and appearance within the wider British culture.

In this chapter the previous literature on the topic of heterosexual people’s understandings of gay, lesbian, (and bisexual) appearance is reviewed. Then the procedure of the survey, the demographics of the participants, and the results of the data analysis are reported.

Previous literature

There is some previous literature which is relevant to this study, in the form of experimental studies which broadly speaking examined ‘attitudes’, stereotypes, and prejudice towards lesbians and gay men (but not bisexual people). This research began in the 1970s and 1980s, during the early period of the lesbian and gay rights movement (see Chapter Two), when homosexuality per se had only recently been declassified as a mental illness. These studies included those by U.S. psychologists Theodore Weissbach and Gary Zagon (1975), Michael Storms and his colleagues (Storms, Stivers, Lambers, and Hill, 1981), Rhoda Unger, Marcia Hilderbrand, and Therese Madar (1982), and Mary Dew (1985), as well as by U.S. sociologists Kenneth Nyberg and Jon Alston (1977a; 1977b), and Mary Riege Laner and Roy Laner (1979; 1980), which all included discussions of appearance.

Authors reviewed the literature of the time, and concluded that heterosexual ‘attitudes’ towards both male and female homosexuality were overwhelmingly negative (Nyberg & Alston, 1977a; Laner & Laner, 1980). These literature reviews, and
the author's experimental findings, indicated that heterosexual people would not associate with homosexuals if they could avoid doing so:

'It would appear that increased media exposure, the public relations efforts of gay organizations, and refinements in professional labels of homosexuality have little, if any, mediating effect on the public's opinions of homosexual relations. The public it would seem, is not ready to follow the lead of the American Psychiatric Association when it redefined homosexuality as a "disturbance" rather than as a "psychiatric disorder"' (Nyberg & Alston, 1977a:103).

In these studies, heterosexual people were found to disapprove of homosexual people, whose sexuality they considered to be vulgar, obscene, psychologically disturbed, sick, wrong, untrustworthy, and dangerous to 'the young' (because, gay men in particular, were perceived as likely to 'seduce' them) (Weissbach & Zagon, 1975; Nyberg & Alston, 1977a; 1977b Laner & Laner, 1980). Further, negative public attitudes towards homosexual people were believed to be likely to influence homosexual people's self perceptions (Laner & Laner, 1980; Nyberg & Alston, 1977a; 1977b). However, critically, in relation to this study, those who were better educated, such as college and university students, were likely to hold less anti-homosexual attitudes (Nyberg & Alston, 1977a; 1977b).

Participants in these early studies viewed particular aspects of appearance as indicative of sexual identity. In Laner and Laner's (1979; 1980) experiments, university students filled out questionnaires, and read descriptions of a fictitious person, who was either described as heterosexual or homosexual, and as hyperfeminine, feminine, or hypofeminine (masculine). Results indicated that participants believed that homosexual people acted like the opposite sex, and that they were identifiable through how they walked, talked and acted, particularly gay men (Laner & Laner, 1979; 1980). Similarly, in another experiment, 20 student participants were introduced to a man, and later told that he was homosexual, or heterosexual. If told he was homosexual then they assessed him to be more feminine than if they were told he was heterosexual (Weissbach & Zagon, 1975).

Storms et al. (1981) conducted a literature review which indicated that heterosexual perceptions were of 'homosexual men as "swishy" and effeminate acting, and homosexual women as "butch" and masculine acting' (p.700). They then conducted an
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experiment in order to investigate ‘sexual scripts’. University students (86 female and 14 male) were presented with written information about a (fictional) woman, who was either described as masculine, or feminine, both in appearance and mannerisms. They then listened to tape recordings of the same woman, in which she was revealed to be either heterosexual or homosexual. Participants were then asked to answer questions about their impressions of the woman. They rated the ‘masculine woman as more homosexual than the feminine woman’ and ‘the woman with homosexual feelings as more masculine than the woman with heterosexual feelings’ (Storms et al., 1981:703).

Further, if a woman was described as feminine, and then revealed to be homosexual, or was described as masculine, and then revealed to be heterosexual, then participants concluded that these women had confused and unstable sexual identities (Storms et al., 1981).

These studies mainly show that heterosexual participants believed that lesbians were recognisable through their masculinity, and gay men through their femininity.

However, Nyberg and Alston (1977b) found somewhat different results when they asked 535 heterosexual university students to fill out a questionnaire about attitudes towards homosexuality. The authors included questions about appearance because ‘prejudicial judgments about people are not particularly salient unless there is some method whereby the individual can identify the alleged deviant’ (Nyberg & Alston, 1977b:542). They found that in the main participants did not believe that homosexual men or women were easy to identify. Nor, on the whole, did participants believe that lesbians adhered to the stereotype of masculinity, although there was some agreement that gay men were likely to be identifiable through feminine appearance.

The authors concluded that heterosexual participants were unable to identify, and unwilling to label, gay men and lesbians.

Laner and Laner (1980) argued that lesbians and gay men who were not differentiable from heterosexual people in their ‘appearance, interests, and activities’ (p50), were not ‘actively’ disliked (see discussion of good gays/bad gays later in this chapter).

Accordingly, the more recognisable lesbians and gay men were, the more likely it was that they would be stigmatised and subject to prejudice:

For lesbians, as for gay men, departures towards either end of the femininity/masculinity continuum of gender styles are either moderately or
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greatly disliked. It may be proposed therefore, that both effeminacy and
masculinisation [are characteristics that] [...] heterosexual individuals find less
than tolerable’ (Laner & Laner, 1980:350).

The literature reviews of Unger, Hilderbrand, and Madar (1982), and Dew (1985)
identified that attractiveness was associated with ‘greater social influence, ability to
succeed, competence, and likability’ (Unger et al., 1982:293) and ‘confidence,
sensitivity, poise, and amiability’ (Dew, 1985:143-144). Accordingly, ‘unattractive’
people were evaluated negatively. For example, they were less likely to be considered
appropriate for high status jobs (Unger et al.,1982), and were less likely to be
members of ‘some [unspecified] social groups’ (Dew, 1985:144).

Unger et al.’s (1982) research investigated feminism and physical attractiveness. They
asked 120 college students to sort photographs into categories, and hypothesised that
photographs of ‘unattractive’ men and women would be more likely to be sorted into
categories that were considered socially deviant, and included homosexuality as one
such category. As predicted, participants assessed the less attractive photographs as
likely to be lesbians significantly often. The authors conclude that physical
attractiveness leads to stereotypical judgements of sexual identity, and that less
attractive individuals are more likely to be judged as socially deviant (Unger et al.,
1982). In Dew’s (1985) experimental study, university students were again asked to
rate photographs. Students had to agree or disagree with statements about the 22
photographs (such as, ‘this woman is an extravert’, or ‘is wealthy’, and critically, ‘this
woman is gay’). However, after this task, participants were advised that half of the
women in the photographs were homosexual, and asked to say which they thought
were gay. If participants rated a photograph as homosexual, then the woman in the
photograph:

‘was also viewed as being less extraverted, and generally less attractive. She was
seen as not dressing as well, not having a pretty face, not having as attractive a
hairstyle, and not being as desirable to meet as a woman not considered to be a
homosexual’ (Dew, 1985:146).

U.S. psychologists Mary Kite & Kay Deaux (1987), asked over 200 male and female
undergraduate students to make attributions about fictional lesbians and gay men.
Words such as ‘masculine’, ‘short hair’, ‘shy’, and ‘unattractive’ were used to describe
lesbians, whereas terms such as ‘feminine’, ‘feminine voice’ and ‘feminine walk’ were
used in descriptions of gay men. Lesbians were also described as ‘strange’ whereas gay
men were described as ‘friendly’ (Kite & Deaux, 1987:88), indicating links between
(un)attractive appearance and assessment of character.

In the U.S., counselling psychologists John Dunkle and Patricia Francis (1990) asked
undergraduate psychology students to indicate how likely it was that people belonged
to particular categories (e.g., teacher, drug-dealer, homosexual), based on
photographs of their faces. More feminine male faces, and more masculine female
faces, were more likely to be assessed as homosexual.

U.S. health researchers Michele Eliason and her colleagues (Eliason, Donelan, and
Randall, 1993) identified a number of stereotypes about lesbians, when they asked
294 (mainly heterosexual female) nursing students three qualitative questions as part
of a wider quantitative health questionnaire. Nearly one third of the sample believed
that lesbians wanted to be men. The authors assessed this belief as partly based on
the ‘higher visibility of lesbians who choose to wear more androgynous or
stereotypically male attire, whether for political or comfort reasons’ (Eliason et al.,
1993:49). The other stereotypes identified in the data were mainly negative, and
positioned lesbians as threatening, for example, that lesbians ‘seduce heterosexual
women’, ‘are too blatant’, ‘are a bad influence on children’ and ‘spread sexually
transmitted diseases’ (Eliason et al., 1993:48-50).

In 1997, U.S. psychologist Stephanie Madon developed a questionnaire of
stereotypical or non-stereotypical words about gay male homosexuality. She asked
115 mainly heterosexual (some homosexual) university students to rate how
characteristic of homosexual men these attributes were. Madon (1997) concluded that
gay men were perceived to be concerned with appearance, artsy looking, and likely to
wear earrings. They were also assessed as melodramatic and emotionally open
(Madon, 1997:681).

Despite the difference in discipline, decade, and methods, the majority of these
findings indicate that heterosexual students recognise sexual identity through
(‘inappropriately’) gendered appearance, and associate this appearance with
particular (often negative) views about the characteristics and behaviour of lesbians
and gay men. These findings mirror the inversion theories of early sexologists (Krafft-Ebing, 1886/1997; 1903; Ellis, 1906/2001, also see Chapters Two and Three).

Most recently, British social scientist Richard Taulke-Johnson (2008; 2010) used qualitative research to broadly investigate gay male student’s experiences of university. Participants who were traditionally masculine in their appearance reported that heterosexual students were surprised to learn of their sexual identity, which indicates that students expected to be able to ‘read’ sexuality from appearance. Further, students appeared to recognise the dictates of particular space, and moderated their self expression accordingly. For example, one gay student commented that he would not ‘wear a tiara’ or ‘mince’ around in university (Taulke-Johnson, 2008:129). Another participant discussed not wishing to test the boundaries of his fellow students ‘tolerance’ and would not invite his visibly identifiable ‘camp’ gay friends back to university accommodation for fear of his flatmates potentially homophobic response (Taulke-Johnson, 2010).

In the previous literature bisexual people were once again entirely overlooked and this survey will be the first research to investigate heterosexual perceptions of bisexual appearance. This innovative survey also makes a unique contribution in being the first British, and first qualitative research, to specifically focus on unravelling how lesbians, gay men, and bisexual men and women are read through their appearance within British contemporary culture. Further, it will also be the first survey which asks heterosexual people about their own visual identity. These findings will increase knowledge and advance understandings of heterosexual’s perceptions of sexual identity and appearance.
Procedure

Development of questions and piloting

Ethical approval was gained to conduct the research (UWE ethics HLS08-505). The broad aim of the survey was to find out whether young (mainly) heterosexual students recognised appearance norms for lesbians and gay men, bisexual men and women, and heterosexual men and women.

The survey questions were piloted with 6 students enrolled on a third year undergraduate Gender and Psychology module at UWE. Several pilot versions of the survey were given (see Appendix 3A). In the pilot versions the question was phrased in two ways. These were ‘If someone asked you to describe what a (lesbian/gay man/bisexual man/woman/ heterosexual man/woman) typically looks like, what would you say?’ and ‘In what ways would you recognise that someone was a blank from their appearance?’ . There were also differences in how the survey was formatted, with 3 versions. These were a ‘booklet’ version (i.e., printed on A3 paper and folded into a booklet, rather than simply A4 paper stapled together), a non-booklet version, or a differently spaced (paper saving) option.

All students were given both phrasings of the questions, and viewed all 3 versions of the survey. They were asked to fill out the survey\(^{161}\), and state their views and preferences for the phrasing of the questions, and the formatting. They were also asked their experience of filling out the survey, how long it took them, whether the information sheet was of appropriate length and detail, whether they found the questions easy to understand and respond to, and whether they had any other comments. The final survey format, and the phrasing of the question, was based on their feedback.

The final survey (see Appendix 3B) included six questions. There was a question for each gender/sexual identity, phrased in the same way for each one. This was ‘If someone asked you to describe what a (sexual identity) typically looks like, what would you say? (E.g., in what ways could you potentially recognise a (sexual identity) from their appearance?)’. A final ‘catch all’ question asked ‘Is there anything else you’d like to add about appearance and sexuality?’.

\(^{161}\) These pilot responses were included in the analysis, because the answers given were similar, regardless of the wording of the question or the layout of the survey.
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Method

Participants were asked to complete either a hard copy, paper version of the survey (see appendices 3B and 3F), or an identical online version. The front sheet/first page introduced me and my research. It outlined key ethical details such as the UWE ethics application number, that participation was voluntary, and that their details would remain anonymous and confidential. It specified that students could withdraw at any time and informed them of how to do so. Participants were informed that by filling out the survey they were consenting to taking part. Finally, they were advised that taking part was not anticipated to cause them any distress but, in case it did so, details of counselling services at UWE were provided.

All participants were asked to answer all the questions in the survey. They were asked mainly closed questions about their demographic status, although race and ethnicity, and gender were left open-ended so that the participants could choose their own answers. After asking participants to choose ‘which of the following most closely describes your sexuality?’ (the responses available were ‘bisexual, lesbian, gay or heterosexual’), an open ended question allowed them to elaborate further on ‘any other ways that you would describe your sexuality?’. Requesting these details allowed me to gain a profile of the sample.

Recruitment

Initially permission to distribute the survey was sought from UWE psychology lecturers, and paper copies were given to undergraduate psychology students during their lectures in various modules. Students were asked to fill out the survey and return it to a box located outside my office. This resulted in a minimal response: approximately 300 surveys were distributed, and only 30 were returned. It is possible that participants were not motivated to take part without an incentive, particularly as UWE psychology students are ‘credit driven’, because they are awarded credits for participating in research projects. These projects are listed in an online recruitment tool called the ‘participant pool’, and students must earn a set number of credits as a statutory part of their degree.

Therefore, the next recruitment strategy was to utilise the online psychology ‘participant pool’ (see Appendix 3C). It was also anticipated that a better response
would be achieved if the survey were also available online, so that students could be taken directly to the survey by clicking on a link. Thus the survey was transferred verbatim, including the information sheet and consent form, into SurveyMonkey (www.surveymonkey.com) (after the demise of UWE’s software). This website is free to use, and overcame any requirement for me or my participants to have extensive technical knowledge, because the software was simple and user friendly (e.g., Mann & Stewart, 2004; Harding & Peel, 2007). The format and appearance of online data collection software can make taking part fun and appealing, and surveys are simple for participants to fill out\(^{162}\) (Mann & Stewart, 2004). Further, the participants could complete the survey anonymously and confidentially at a time and place that best suited them. This strategy resulted in a further 74 responses.

In a final recruitment strategy, undergraduate students studying courses with visual or fashion content were also asked to participate, because it was anticipated that they might have different perspectives on appearance and identity due to the visual aspect of their degrees. For this reason another UWE campus (Bower Ashton), was visited\(^{163}\), where art, culture, and media studies are the main focus. It was not possible to offer course credits, and instead a poster was displayed (see Appendix 3E), offering students chocolate as an incentive/thank you for participating. I reverted to a paper version of the survey (see Appendix 3F), so that participants could complete the questions there and then, and receive their chocolate upon completion, to maximise the return rate. This resulted in a further 66 responses. However, in their answers no novel responses were being generated and the recruitment was drawn to a close with a final sample size of 176.

\(^{162}\)Students were required to create a unique participant code to allow their data to be found and destroyed should they wish to withdraw. In order for course credit to be awarded, students were asked to email me on completion of the survey. Therefore I was aware of the student’s names. This was a disadvantage of the participant pool credit system, but I ensured that I deleted their emails and password protected a spreadsheet of their names, and participant codes (retained in case they chose to withdraw).

\(^{163}\)Permission to hand out the survey was sought from lecturers at Bower Ashton Campus before commencing.
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Demographics

I report the key demographic information in order to provide a broad picture of those who took part (see summary in Appendix 3G). A large sample of 176 UWE students filled out the survey, only one of whom omitted to provide any demographical information. Most (110) were psychology students, the remainder were enrolled on fashion/textile (29), art/graphic design (20) or media (16) courses.

Ages ranged from 18 to 51, although most were aged between 18 and 21 (157). One hundred and thirty-two defined as female and 43 as male. In the main, participants were heterosexual (162). Of the 13 non-heterosexual participants, 7 were bisexual (1 man, 6 women), 3 were gay men, and one a lesbian woman. Two declined to label their sexuality in these categories, but utilised the box which asked if there were other ways in which they defined their sexuality: one said ‘queer’ and the other wrote ‘I believe you are attracted to the person themselves, not their sex’.

Most participants identified as white (155), and middle class (112), although a quarter indicated that they were working class (43). Most students were able bodied, although 8 were not. Six of them gave details of their ‘disabled’ status, which were Aspergers and deafness, distal spinal muscular atrophy, dyslexia (2), hearing, and depression/anxiety.

Analysis

Having attended a training course on the software NVivo, I chose to use this programme to assist in the thematic analysis of the survey responses. The software does not undertake any analysis as such; it is effectively a tool in the manual organisation of data into categories. A similar process was undertaken for the responses to survey data as for the interview data (see Chapter Five). However the use of NVivo, and the ‘thinner’ data generated in the survey, made the process somewhat simpler.
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Results

This section reports the four key themes which were identified through inductive thematic analysis. The first theme, “P.S. I’m sorry about the stereotypes I used to answer the questions”, describes the participants’ reluctance to discuss ‘stereotypes’ around appearance and sexual identity. However, despite this, the participants’ responses provided strongly gendered images of lesbians, gay men, and heterosexual people. In the second and third themes I report on the participants’ picture of ‘inappropriately’ gendered lesbians and gay men, in contrast to ‘appropriately’ gendered heterosexual people. In the fourth theme I report on their (lack of) image of bisexuality.

1. “P.S. I’m sorry about the stereotypes I used to answer the questions”

The survey questions asked participants how they could potentially recognise sexual identity from an individual’s appearance. In all versions of the survey the students were advised:

‘There are no right or wrong answers! Please don’t be worried about being ‘politically correct’. Just write what first comes to your mind, even if you think that what has come into your head is ‘stereotypical’. I am collecting this information simply to find out more about your impressions of people’s appearance’.

Despite (or perhaps because of) this statement, students seemed reluctant to answer the question, and frequently introduced caveats to their answers, or expressed dislike of, and disassociation from, stereotypes. This mirrors the findings of Nyberg and Alston (1977b).

P9 apologised for drawing on stereotypical notions when he said that people’s ‘appearance does not necessarily represent their sexuality. P.S I’m sorry about the stereotypes I used to answer the questions’ (P9 HM22\textsuperscript{164}). Many of the students explicitly dismissed stereotypes as inaccurate. P5 wrote: ‘stereotypes are problematic

\textsuperscript{164}The details in brackets provide details of the student: Participant number, sexuality (bisexual/gay/heterosexual/lesbian/queer or other), gender (female/male) and age. Unless the meaning is unclear I do not amend the spelling, grammar, or punctuation in the participants’ written responses; if interpretation was deemed necessary then it is included in ( ). One student did not find time to complete the demographic section and is reported as no data (n.d.).
& appearance is not a good indicator of sexuality’ (P5, n.d.), and P122 stated ‘there is so much stereotypes but its all fable and we shouldn’t judge people on how they look’ (P122 HF21). The idea that stereotypes lead to ‘judgements’ was referred to by a number of participants, and P13 cautioned: ‘never judge a book by its cover!’ (P13, HF19). This indicated that the students believed that (appearance) stereotypes could lead to evaluations of character.

However, in dismissing appearance stereotypes as entirely negative, the students’ heteronormative outlook on sexuality was revealed. Unsurprisingly, these heterosexual students (who are ‘outsiders’ when contemplating aspects of lesbian and gay identity), seemed to lack any awareness that appearance ‘stereotypes’ (or norms) can be beneficial in any way. As discussed in Chapters One and Two, appearance norms have been valued by lesbians and gay men, because they have served particular purposes, such as increasing their visibility, and rights (also see, Peel, 2001). I am not advocating any notion that all stereotypes hold true, nor disputing their potentially harmful consequences, rather suggesting that stereotypes require more complex analysis, rather than overly simplistic dismissal as ‘bad’ and entirely fictitious.

A number of participants preceded their answers with statements such as ‘stereotypically I would say …’ (P61 HF19, P90 HF18, P145 HF19, P103 HF29), or ended them by saying ‘but that’s a stereotype’ (P115 HF19). In doing so the students strategically used the term ‘stereotype’ to act as a disclaimer (Hewitt & Stokes, 1975). Disclaimers allow people to overcome the risk of embarrassing themselves, or saying the ‘wrong thing’ (Hewitt & Stokes, 1975), and are often employed when individuals feel concerned that they may appear to be prejudiced (e.g., when discussing sensitive topics such as racism, sexism and sexual identity). Participants can disassociate from their own opinions, and instead offer ‘factual accounts’, rather than frame their statements as personal opinions which they take ownership of. This alleviates the possibility that individuals themselves will be interpreted as prejudicial (Speer & Potter, 2000). Therefore, the student’s use of stereotypes as disclaimers reveals their concern for being conceived of as prejudiced, which in turn reflects their liberal viewpoints which conflate ‘sameness’ with ‘equality’.

Other participants went further in protecting their integrity by referencing stereotypes as a way of entirely refusing to engage with answering the question: ‘I
would say that there is no stereotypical way to identify a lesbian, any more than it is possible to classify a straight person’ (P60 HM29), and ‘I wouldn’t know what to say. You can’t really, no more than you can say what food a plumber typically eats’.

We’re all aware of the stereotype but that’s not accurate. (sorry!)’ (P59 HM33). P59 insinuates that to evaluate sexual identity via appearance is ridiculous, and positions himself as aware, but disdainful, of stereotypes. Furthermore, his response implies that the question I have asked is not meaningful, and unworthy of reply.

Recent literature discusses how British students believe they are liberal minded and accepting of everyone, regardless of their sexuality (Clarke, 2005; Ellis, 2009; Peel, 2010). These students seemed to believe that they are tolerant and that everyone is equal, which may reflect the relatively liberal political climate in which they have grown up. They have lived most of their lives in the U.K. under a Labour Government, which has (publicly) endorsed equality for LGBT people through legislative means (http://lgbtlabour.org.uk/therrecord; http://www.labour.org.uk/policies/equalities).

Liberalistic strategies, which aim to improve the lives of lesbians and gay men, have focused on ‘inclusion’ (assimilation) and ‘equal rights’ (sameness). These approaches strive for ‘equality’, whereby the underpinning assumption is that LGBT people must be ‘treated no differently to anyone else’ (Brickell, 2001:222, emphasis added).

Therefore, a framework is created, where to become ‘equal to’ implies ‘the same as’, which when reversed means that ‘different from’ implies ‘unequal to’. Therefore to recognise ‘difference’ becomes equated with implying ‘deficient’ (Kitzinger, 1987; Stacey & Biblarz, 2001; Hicks, 2005).

However, some LGBTQ scholars argue that lesbians, gay men and bisexual people are ‘othered’ by mainstream western society, and therefore have ‘different’ life experience from heterosexuals (e.g., Brickell, 2001; Hicks, 2005). One argument is that liberal discourses promote tolerance, which is not the same as equality. Tolerance relies on homosexuals playing by heterosexual rules; hence heterosexual acceptance is based on ‘good behaviour’. This has created the ‘good gay/bad gay’ dichotomy. ‘Good

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165 However, his analogy does not stand up under scrutiny: the income and class background of particular professions mean that in actuality it is possible to provide a considered response of what food a plumber might eat.

166 The most notable of these legal changes included an equal age of consent for sex between men, a change to homophobic acts being classed as hate crimes, the abolition of Section 28, which made the ‘promotion’ (or in reality the teaching) of homosexuality in schools illegal, and the introduction of civil partnerships and rights to adopt as a same-sex couple.
gays’ mirror heterosexual’s lives by merging into mainstream heterosexual society by
dressing ‘normally’ (e.g., appropriately for their sex/gender), keeping their ‘private
lives’ private (Smith, 1994; Taulke-Johnson, 2010). In contrast, ‘bad gays’ disrupt
heterosexist norms by ‘ flaunting’ their sexuality and ‘daring’ to make their difference
apparent through their dress and (possibly politically active) lifestyle. In doing so they
are ‘rocking the heteronormative boat’ (Taulke-Johnson, 2010:412).

Further, liberalistic standpoints focus on the happiness of ‘the individual’, and as a
consequence overlook the structure and existence of heteronormativity, which
reinforces ‘the dominance of heterosexuality and the subordination of homosexuality’
(Brickell, 2001:212). These students revealed their liberalism when they took an
individualistic stance towards sexual identity. They made comments about diversity
and difference within sexual identity categories, for example, ‘I Don’t think Lesbians
typically have their own style or appearance. Everyone dresses differently and looks
different’ (P120 HF22). However, in contrast, they were resistant to the notion of
diversity across sexualities, and did not acknowledge that LGB people can look
different from heterosexuals. Furthermore, these (liberally minded) students consider
it inappropriate to admit that they notice difference, or that they could recognise
someone’s sexuality through their appearance, because this risks them being
considered prejudicial. As P50 said ‘I don’t generally try to assess people’s sexuality
when I look at them! I don’t really think that it matters!’ (P50 HF33). These students
appear to believe that prejudice has been superseded by equality, and that
discrimination against LGBT people is an issue of the past (also see, Clarke, 2005,
Hegarty, 2006; Ellis, 2009; Peel, 2010). However, polls of LGBT people indicate that
they still fear harassment, bullying, violence, and damage to their properties (Hegarty,
2006). This picture is echoed within universities, where ‘equality agendas’ for LGBT
people are endorsed, but LGBT academic staff, and LGBT students, have negative
experiences, such as verbal abuse and threats of violence on campus (see, for
example, Taulke-Johnson, 2008; 2010; Ellis, 2009; Clarke, Ellis, Peel & Riggs, 2010).

Despite the students’ hesitance to discuss sexuality and appearance, they were clearly
able to describe images of what lesbians and gay men might look like. Most of the
students presented a picture of the ‘masculine’, ‘butch’ lesbian and the dichotomous
‘feminine’, ‘effeminate’ gay man, indicating that understandings of lesbian and gay
appearance have changed very little since the research which emerged in the 1970s/1980s, as described above.

2. Inappropriately gendered: Masculine ‘butch’ lesbians and effeminate ‘feminine’ gay men

**Butch (and femme) lesbians**

The participants predominantly described lesbians as butch and/or masculine. Some students wrote particularly short answers such as ‘manly or butch’ (P54 HF20), ‘short hair, masculine looking, butch’ (P106 HF19), while P136 simply wrote ‘butch’ (P136 HM21), which supports previous research on heterosexual understandings of lesbian appearance (e.g., Storms et al., 1981; Eliason et al., 1993). These brief responses suggest that the butch lesbian is so well recognised that she requires no further elaboration. Once again, as in the interviews with bisexual women (Chapter Seven), the main understanding was that lesbians might look butch (e.g., Krakauer & Rose, 2002; Clarke & Turner, 2007), which links back to early sexological theories of gender inversion (Krafft-Ebing, 1886/1997; 1903; Ellis, 1906/2001), as described in Chapters Two and Three.

Lesbians were generally described as ‘having a slightly ‘mannish’ appearance’ (P65 HF18), and most students portrayed hair as a key marker of a ‘lesbian look’. P37 referred to a ‘boyish haircut’ (P37 HF22), and P61 said ‘very short hair, not shaved, but cropped in a typically masculine way’ (P61 HF19). One suggested that lesbians had ‘short, masculine style hair’ (P72 HM19), and overall these students knew enough about visual identity to ‘get the message’ that lesbian appearance norms include short hair (e.g., Esterberg, 1996a; Myers, Taub, Morris & Rothblum, 1999; Krakauer & Rose, 2002). However, some students had the specific cultural knowledge to offer more refined descriptions, similar to those provided by lesbians themselves in recent research on visual identity (Clarke & Turner, 2007). Several students provided more detail about ‘lesbian hair’, which ‘tends to be spiky or boy’s style. Sometimes the hair would have colouring in it, perhaps eccentric such as bright pink or blue’ (P7 HF19), and ‘Short spikey hair. Usually dyed hair’ (P117 HM20), and ‘short dark hair, quite often styled (with gel)’ (P90 HF18).

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167 However, these brief answers could also reflect a lack of engagement with the survey.
Shoes were mentioned in a few responses. P13 implied that lesbian shoes are a cultural commonplace when she simply wrote ‘lesbian shoes!’ (P13 HF19). P103 stated that the lesbian ‘wears masculine clothes and shoes’ (P103 HF29), other were more specific, for example ‘comfortable’ shoes’ (P22 HF19), ‘flat shoes’ (P84 HF21) or ‘flat shoes - never heels’ (P119 HF18). There were references to trainers, and a couple to boots, for example ‘Doc Martins [sic]’ (P131 HF51). What these styles of shoe indicate is that lesbians are perceived to value comfort over style, and will choose more masculine, or gender neutral footwear.

The masculine lesbian is so masculine that she was sometimes even depicted as ‘wearing typically male clothes’ (P72 HM19). P48 stated that lesbians ‘had short hair, wore no make-up and dressed in a quite a masculine way’ (P48 HF20), while one student wrote ‘I see lesbian as short hair, a little bit look like a man, trousers. Might be because I know a few lesbians who are rather man style’\(^{168}\) (P83 HF22). P105 thought that lesbians wore ‘trousers, and clothes normally worn by males, and not by straight females’ (P105 HM19). Particular clothes (Rothblum, 1994a; Esterberg, 1996a; Myers, et al., 1999; Winn & Nutt, 2001; Krakauer & Rose, 2002; Clarke & Turner, 2007; Johnson, Gill, Reichman & Tessinary, 2007) and shoes (e.g., Rothblum, 1994a; Clarke & Turner, 2007) have been identified in the multidisciplinary literature as norms of lesbian appearance. It was clear that these students recognised enough to indicate that images of lesbians do filter through to heterosexual society.

In many of the participant accounts, butch lesbians were perceived to undervalue their appearance because they made little effort, and were unconcerned with how they looked. This perception (which defies the tradition that women ought to care about, and invest in, their appearance, e.g., Chapkis, 1984; Brownmiller, 1984/1986; Tseelon, 1995; Jeffreys, 2005), underpinned derogatory descriptions of lesbian looks and looking. Lesbians were understood to ‘not [have] very good dress sense’ (P10 HF18) and be ‘not v. attractive.’ (P119 HF18). They were described as ‘scruffy’ (P152 HF19, P117 HM20), and there were numerous references to lesbians wearing little or no make-up. The idea that lesbians are ‘not so vain’ (P102 HF19) proffers an explanation

\(^{168}\) This participant is one of the few who is took ownership of her opinion; she knows some lesbians and this has perhaps enabled her to feel able to comment without the need for a disclaimer.
to why they might wear ‘unfashionable clothes, [and are] not really too bothered about how they look’ (P93 HF21).

It could be argued that the masculine lesbian causes offense in her defiance of heterosexual women’s appearance norms. The lesbian’s lack of investment in femininity is equated with a lack of investment in her (unkempt) appearance, and because she does not comply with traditional femininity, she cannot be considered attractive (Blackman & Perry, 1990; Rothblum, 1994a), which supports findings of studies conducted with heterosexual people during the 1980s (e.g., Dew, 1985; Unger et al., 1982). What was also apparent was that the effort and investment required to maintain ‘short funky’ hair styles, and create a wider butch or lesbian look, was entirely overlooked. This could be because investment in appearance has been conflated with femininity and associated beauty norms, which are understood to be the underpinnings of what constitutes attractiveness (e.g., Tseelon, 1995).

There was some data which evidenced awareness of ‘softer’ boyish lesbians, and lesbians who were somewhat ‘less girly’ (perhaps androgynous), in their appearance. The image of a boyish butch lesbian was as: ‘quite boyish in appearance i.e. short haircuts, trousers’ (P42 HF21), and ‘slightly boyish clothes’ (P46 HF33). Others also used the term ‘boyish’ or spoke of ‘less feminine clothes’ (P75 HM21,) and perhaps this reflects more recent conceptualisation of lesbians as ‘boyish’ as opposed to ‘masculine’, for example, singer/songwriter Alex Parks, and the character Shane in The L Word.

The image of the ‘girly-girl’ (a term used by the bisexual women in Chapter Seven) resurfaced when lesbians were presented in contrast to her. The lesbian woman is ‘not a "girly girl" - short hair (really stereotypical!) - perhaps not into clothes/make-up as much’ (P2 HF20). Sometimes, then, participants defined lesbians by what they do not do with their appearance. Accordingly the lesbian ‘doesn’t tend to wear dresses’ (P55 HF19) and ‘doesn’t wear a lot of skirts’ (P81 HF18), has ‘jeans and shirts rather than skirts and heels’ (P79 HF21) or as P105 exclaimed ‘I would not expect a lesbian to wear frilly, flowing skirts!’ (P109 HF25). P79 wrote:

‘they tend to be less girly than other girls. wear more neutral clothing like jeans and shirts rather than skirts and heels. lesbians that i know often hate pink, glitter anything considered really girly! often go for shorter haircuts too’ (P79 HF21).
Very few participants referred to femme/inine lesbians. The term ‘femme’ was used only once, by a queer participant (who feasibly might have ‘insider’ knowledge), who stated ‘femme/butch aesthetics’ (P155 QF21). However, other participants referred to ‘feminine’ or ‘normal’ lesbians, and it was apparent that they meant femme lesbians. However, the minimal references to femme/inine lesbians indicates that to these students femmes are somewhat invisible, just as they often are in wider society (e.g., Ciasullo, 2001; Eves, 2004). What was also noticeable was that if feminine lesbians were mentioned, then it was only alongside, and after, butch lesbians. For example, ‘Butch lesbian - masculine, short hair etc but could also look extremely feminine’ (P4 BF21). Similarly P28 said ‘I think there are stereotypically 2 types of lesbian. 1. Butch: Short hair, sometimes a bit masculine, tank tops etc 2. So called 'normal' - dress with the norm, quite feminine etc (P28 HF18). As P96 said: ‘within a lesbian relationship there can be a butch type one and a feminine lesbian. So i would describe a lesbian to typically look masculine or feminine’ (P96 HF18), hence the student’s understandings were that butch and femme lesbians exist in partnership with each other (e.g., Reilly & Lynch, 1990; Feinberg, 1993; Smyth, 1998; Eves, 2004).

In summary, these students were able to describe an image of the butch/masculine lesbian, and did so much more often, and in more detail, than they provided a picture of the femme/inine lesbian.

**Effeminate gay men**

In the main the students described gay men as effeminate, therefore in direct contrast to the butch/masculine lesbian. This response from P41 represents the common picture: ‘a gay man in the typical view would have a very well kept appearance a lot of effort would be made on his hair and dress choice, this would typically be very trendy and often a bit flamboyant’ (P41 HF20).

Hair was as much of a factor in gay men’s effeminacy as it was in lesbian’s masculinity. Gay men were perceived to make an effort with their hair, apparent in descriptions of ‘styled’ or even ‘sculpted hair’ (P97 HF19), which was ‘well pruned’ (P125 HF20). As P56 wrote, gay men will have ‘some kind of funky hair do -takes pride in it, maybe even some highlights’ (P56 HF19). P79 made clear that hair sets gay men apart from heterosexual men because ‘gay guys tend to have their hair done (highlights etc) whereas straight men dont tend to’ (P79 HF21). Gay man’s hair was also ‘short/gelled
Part Three: Chapter Nine: “Never judge a book by its cover”?: Students’ understandings of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and heterosexual appearance

/spiky hair./ (P172 HF22), and often written about as containing ‘product’. The notion of gay men making an effort with their hair was in direct contrast with the image of the scruffy short haired lesbian.

P53’s quote exemplified the students’ image when she compared gay men to heterosexual men:

‘he may take more time over his appearance than the typical male, with particularly 'trendy' hair (highlights, gel etc) tighter clothes than a straight male might wear, obviously the stereotype would be to wear pink, but in general would be quite fashionable and the outfit would match’ (P53 HF20).

This leads into the common understanding that gay men are invested in their appearance and make an effort in their dress. The students rarely made reference to specific items of clothing, but frequently described the gay man as ‘well dressed and looks after his hair and skin. More of a feminine appearance’ (P102 HF19). The theme of the well groomed man ran throughout their descriptions, for example, one participant described the gay man as ‘fashionable, always perfectly matched and coordinated’ (P47 HF20). Another said ‘someone who dresses very well i.e. clothes nicely fitted, fashionable (current trends), good hygiene. Generally a tidy appearance, neat hairstyle. No baggy or dirty clothes. Tries to have an immaculate appearance at all times’ (P48 HF20).

‘Bright’ and ‘tight’ were words which the students often called upon. Brightness was understood by several participants to be about dressing in pink, for example, ‘pink coloured clothes’ (P161 BF20), or other ‘bright colours; pinks, yellows, etc.’ (P117 HM20). Those students who were not specific about colour described ‘colourful clothes’ (P98 HF18), and ‘bright coloured clothes’ (P75 HM21). That bright colours are associated with femininity was explicitly stated, for example: ‘They would be wearing a shirt or a tight top in a feminine colour such as a pink or a light blue’ (P90 HF19), and he could even have a ‘man bag - pink/bright (what would be seen as feminine colours)’ (P2 HF20), the latter a reflection of gay men as breaking traditional gender boundaries by having a ‘handbag for men’ (Vandecasteele & Geuens, 2009). The gay man might even ‘possibly wear womens clothes’ (P171 HM21). Bright feminine styles were understood to set gay men apart from heterosexual men: ‘very colourful style based clothing, perhaps not what a straight man would normally wear’ (P105 HM19). The
student's images of gay men reflected the psychological literature, which has identified that the effeminate gay man is often understood to be feminised in part through his (tighter) clothing (e.g., Kaiser, 1998; Cole, 2000; Clarke & Turner, 2007). This again links back to the inversion theories of the early sexologists (Krafft-Ebing, 1886/1997; 1903; Ellis, 1906/2001), as described in Chapters Two and Three.

Many of the participants focused on the gay man as having a 'keen interest in fashion, well dressed' (P22 HF19) and 'always wears the latest trends, wears nothing baggy or scruffy' (P56 HF19). These fashionable clothes might even be "labels" of posh designers' (P61 HF19), perhaps a reflection of a look available to particular (childless and middle class) gay men, as an expression of their sexuality, accessible through the 'pink pound' (Morgan, 1998/2007; Miller, 2005). The 'pink pound' (Morgan, 1998/2007; Jones & Pugh, 2005; Miller, 2005; Koller, 2008; Vandecasteele & Geuens, 2009) is a term based on the notion that (all) gay men have high disposable incomes (Jones & Pugh, 2005; Vandecasteele & Geuens, 2009). The implication is that gay men are wealthy, and have spending power, and therefore particular goods have become specifically aimed at them (Jones & Pugh, 2005). However, it has also been identified that those gay men who do not have the capital to invest in 'looking the part', may be stigmatised within gay space, and class divisions become created or upheld (Morgan, 1998/2007; Jones & Pugh, 2005).

Gay men were expected to value their appearance in similar ways to heterosexual women and therefore the practices of gay men were understood to be similar to those of heterosexual women. P3 stated that 'I imagine gay men to be quite feminine. Taking pride in their appearance and maintaining it (through waxing/fake tanning etc)' (P3 HF20), while P163 wrote that the gay man is 'feminine. cares about appearance. attention to small details (shoes, stubble, designer) (like a straight woman)' (P163, HF21). Shoes were mentioned by a few, and fitted with investment in appearance as they were 'nice shoes' (P37 HF22, P46 HF33, P141 HM20), 'clean shoes' (P130 HF22) or 'smart shoes' (P90 HF18, P157 HM20).

Further, gay men were portrayed as engaged with exactly those 'feminine' beauty practices which feminist lesbians traditionally rejected (see Chapters Two and Eight). For example, gay men were sometimes described as removing body hair. They might engage in 'waxing' (P3 HF20), have 'waxed eyebrows' (P47 HF20) or 'plucked
eyebrows’ (P86 HM20). They were also anticipated to be ‘clean shaven or [have] very well groomed facial hair’ (P38 HM20). Others agreed that gay men had ‘no body hair’ (P75 HM21) or ‘shaved most hair on body, smooth skin’ (P83 HF22). There were some references to (what was usually described as a fake) tan. Gay men, unlike lesbians, but like heterosexual women, were (occasionally) described as using ‘make-up’. One participant described a ‘feminine face, long eyelashes. Plump lips, some make-up, including eye liner’ (P57 HF18), while P130 wrote, ‘wearig concealer/ foundation’ (P130 HF22). A gay man apparently has ‘nice complexion’ (P139 HM19) and ‘smells nice’ (P160 HF23).

What was also clear was that to take this much pride in appearance was not appropriate for men (e.g., Frith & Gleson, 2004), because men are traditionally paired with masculinity, not femininity. This inappropriateness shows in their comments that gay men ‘tend to be obsessed with their appearance’ (P94 HM20) or are ‘a bit image possessed (obsessed)’ (P115 HF19). The student’s descriptions were also underpinned by a theme of the excessiveness of gay men’s appearance, and I have italicised those words which demonstrate this. The gay man was ‘well groomed - over groomed’ (P150 HF23) or the ‘slightly over feminine looking male’ (P22 HM19). P86 suggested that the gay has an ‘orange face (too much fake tan)’ (P86 HM20), and they apparently used ‘lots of hair product applied (gel etc)’ (P108 HM19). The gay man is ‘sometimes extravagantly dressed’ (P91 HF20), ‘incredibly fashionable’ (P15 GM19), ‘very trendy (over the top trendy)’ (P159 HF19) and even ‘dressed a little bit too well’ (P26 HM19) or is more generally ‘over the top’ (P118 HM18).

The gay man then, is not like the ‘typical’ (heterosexual) male, because he values his appearance, and spends time on ‘looking good’. The descriptions of gay men’s over investment in appearance were in direct opposition to the portrayals of butch/masculine lesbian’s underinvestment in appearance. However, gay men’s overinvestment (unlike lesbian’s underinvestment) was not necessarily problematic, because the end result is attractive, trendy and stylish.

*Depictions of gay men in the media*

P103 described the gay men as:
‘well-groomed, stylish man who takes a lot of care over his appearance, walks and talks in an effeminate way and who possibly wears fake-tan. I would also assume that anyone who looked like a member of Village People was gay (so big moustache, leather waistcoat with no shirt, flamboyant dress) {P103 HF29}.

This quotation makes reference to 1980s U.S. disco group The Village People (the group members were gay icons), and another said ‘camp nature, Elton John, feminate’ (P10 HM20). However, both are somewhat dated images, and rather different from contemporary mainstream gay celebrities, such as Julian Clary, Graham Norton, or Dale Winton.

Most students’ perceptions mirrored more contemporary depictions in mainstream mass media, of gay men as experts in fashion, highly invested in their own and others’ appearance. Nowhere is this better exemplified than through TV shows such as Queer Eye for the Straight Guy (QEFTSG), and How to Look Good Naked (HTLGN). These shows may offer some insight into why the student’s images of the overinvested gay man were presented as less problematic for these students than image of the underinvested lesbian.

In Queer Eye for the Straight Guy five gay men, the ‘Fab Five’, make over a heterosexual man and his home\textsuperscript{169}. They are depicted as experts in food and wine, culture, interior design, and critically, fashion and grooming. How to Look Good Naked is presented by Gok Wan. He is a gay man who offers ‘expert’ advice to women, making them over during the course of the show, while aiming to boost their confidence enough to get them to pose naked in a shop window by the end of the episode. These types of shows are extremely popular (Weiss, 2005; Sender, 2006; Westerfelhaus & Lacroix, 2006), but have come under the scrutiny of scholars of media, psychology, and sociology, who have in particular highlighted how QEFTSG caricatures gay men and reproduces stereotypical images of feminine gay men (Weiss, 2005; Sender, 2006), and heterosexual masculinity (Sender, 2006; Westerfelhaus & Lacroix, 2006). They implicitly encourage consumption, and position gay men as affluent, white, and middle class (Miller, 2005; Sender, 2006). Further they ‘somewhat paradoxically’ offer a narrative of heterosexual men benefitting from gay men’s perspectives (including of appearance) in order to become better heterosexuals,

\textsuperscript{169} There are different versions of QEFTSG in different countries, although the programmes follow a similar format.
therefore these types of shows may fuel metrosexual\textsuperscript{170} versions of masculinity
(Sender, 2006:132; see discussion below). It has also been suggested that the images
of gay men in QEFTSG serve to reiterate that only particular versions of gay sexuality
are permitted into the mainstream in heterosexist society (Westerfelhaus & Lacroix,
2006). Similarly, \textit{HTLGN} represents Gok Wan as a friendly, feminine, expert of fashion.
In terms of representations of gay men and their sexuality within mainstream mass
media, Gok Wan has only an ‘invisible visibility’, because he is presented as a sanitised
version of a gay man, who has no desire of his own (Frith, Raisborough & Klein, 2010).
Just as a few participants had identified a feminine version of lesbian sexuality, a few
also presented the ‘feminine’ versus ‘normal’ gay man, where normality is seemingly a
‘good gay’ who assimilates with the appearance and behaviour of the masculine
heterosexual man (e.g., Taulke-Johnson, 2010). P28 replied, ‘2 types 1. Quite feminine,
pride in appearance etc 2. Intravertly gay - ‘normal’ in appearance with gay
tendencies’ (P28 HF18). P89 stated that ‘some gay men have a rather feminine
appearance. Some look like normal men (masculine) (P89 HF20)’. These heterosexual
students understood enough about visual identity to recognise a very particular
version of a gay man, but overlooked that:

‘If there is a unifying feature of gayness, however, it is diversity. Some gay men
will adopt feminine styles, ultimately some parody of women through drag,
while others will adhere to a stereotypical masculinity. Between these two almost
polar extremes exists an infinite variety of identities and lifestyles’ (Jones & Pugh,

Lesbians and gay men were portrayed by participants as directly opposite to each
other, and I now turn to their discussion of heterosexuality, where heterosexual men
and heterosexual women were also positioned as direct opposites of each other.

\textsuperscript{170} The term metrosexual, a mix of ‘metropolitan’ and ‘heterosexual’ was first used by gay
journalist, Mark Simpson, in the British newspaper, \textit{The Independent}, in 2004,
(www.marksimpson.com). Examples of men who are considered to fit the metrosexual image
of a heterosexual man who values their appearance are footballer David Beckham and rugby
player Gavin Henson (e.g., Khanna, 2004; Harris & Clayton, 2007).
3. Appropriately gendered heterosexual men and women: blokey blokes and girly girls

The students found it far more difficult to respond to the question about heterosexual appearance, despite it being located at the end of the survey so that they were practised at thinking about other people’s sexuality in relation to their appearance, before they answered questions about their own. Many expressed a belief that there were fewer stereotypes for heterosexual people than for lesbians and gay men. This seemed to result in difficulty in answering, based on the taken-for-granted status of heterosexuality (rather than a resistance to stereotypes). This reflects the students’ heteronormative position, whereby for most of them, heterosexuality is ‘normal’, and is therefore unmarked and indistinguishable:

‘Heterosexual women vary a lot in their appearance and depends on individual preference. They are less stereotyped than lesbian women. However I typically see heterosexual women to be well groomed and concerned with appearance’ (P3 HF20).

This led to statements that they could not read heterosexuality through appearance, because there was more individuality in heterosexual looks. Many scholars have argued that heterosexuality is ‘simultaneously everywhere and nowhere’ (e.g., Peel, 2010:226), and I argue that the student’s difficulty in articulating answers was about not being able to see ‘a typical heterosexual’:

‘I would be stumped. […] I think any differences are socially defined and thus bound by culture and time. No group “looks” a certain way but are might instead be considered to “tend away from the average” due to social pressures. Thus, if we take heterosexual women as the “average”, there is no way of differentiating them. Heterosexual women look like women. I guess if I see a women passionately kissing another woman then I assume she isn’t a heterosexual woman’ (P94 HM20).

Many participants referred to heterosexual men and women as ‘normal’, unsurprisingly in light of most participants’ own sexuality. Accordingly the heterosexual woman ‘often doesn’t stand out from other people’ (P21 HF18), and as

\[^{171}\text{This was the case for the heterosexual participants, but not for the 13 non-heterosexual students.}\]
P29 said ‘there isn’t really a stereotype in my opinion as it’s kind of the norm’ (P29 HF18). The students’ responses sometimes quite literally spelt out heteronormative understandings of the world, as P50 stated ‘I would generally assume that most women I come across in daily life are heterosexual, unless they pertain to a specific stereotype (i.e. being butch!)’ (P50 HF33), and ‘generally looks like a woman. I usually assume that a woman is heterosexual’ (P169 HM20). Because they are so familiar with the concept of heterosexuality, these students could not recognise that their sexual identity might be visibly apparent in how they dress and appear.

Some of those who struggled to articulate what a heterosexual person might look like used a strategy of comparing the appearance of lesbians to heterosexual women, or heterosexual men to gay men. This was fascinating, because it is far more common for heterosexuality to be the benchmark against which all else is measured. However, because they had already discussed gay, lesbian and bisexual appearance, the point of comparison was able to shift to lesbians and gay men: ‘I don’t think there is anything particular that makes these women stand out. Perhaps that they do not look like my stereotype for a lesbian’ (P109 HF25), or ‘Just someone not having characteristics of lesbian?’ (P113 HF23). These excerpts perhaps also evidence how heterosexuality (the norm) relies on homosexuality (the ‘other’) in order for it to exist (e.g., Butler, 1990/2006). However, the most common responses were portrayals of ‘girly girls’ and ‘blokey blokes’.

_Girly girls_

Heterosexual women were mainly understood to be (normatively) heavily invested in their appearance, unlike gay men who were (inappropriately) overinvested, or lesbians who were (inappropriately) underinvested. Students commonly reported that heterosexual women ‘makes a lot of effort with the way they look’ (P7 HF19), and many used terms such as ‘concerned with appearance’/ ‘takes care of their appearance’ or ‘well groomed’, as P62 stated, heterosexual women will be invested in ‘making themselves look nice’ (P62 HF18). Heterosexual women were appropriately ‘feminine’, ‘lady like’ (P9 HM22, P52 HF21, P58 HF19) or ‘womanly’ (P126 HM21), and were often described as ‘stylish’ or ‘fashionable’ with ‘up to date clothing style’ (P126 HM18). The heterosexual woman’s clothes were most commonly described as dresses or skirts, hence were clear reflections of a conventional femininity:
‘A heterosexual woman could wear anything, usually either a skirt or something which makes them look feminine, even wearing something with simple patterns on such as flowers would make them look more feminine. They would have well groomed hair and make-up on. When going out to clubs or out in the evening a heterosexual woman would wear a small dress or skirt, showing her cleavage and wearing high heels’ (P90 HF18).

One female participant stated ‘I suppose I would guess shirts, dresses & high heels. But I’m straight & wear boots & jeans so ...!’ (P148 HF20). This perhaps shows how the participants’ answers may have provided only parodies of heterosexual appearance, rather than being a reflection of how the students dressed themselves or ‘believed’ others dressed (and of course this was the case for lesbians and gay men too). Despite the uncertainty over how much they believed in what they were writing, their descriptions were all similar, and can be summed up as ‘slim with long hair, pretty, dressed in a feminine way i.e. skirts, fitted clothes’ (P6 BF22).

Heterosexual femininity often involved ‘long hair’, and according to P57 ‘if hair is short then clothes are excessively feminine to compensate’ (P57 HF18), which reflected an awareness of the requirements of an appropriate femininity (e.g., Tseelon, 1995). The heterosexual woman is expected to be well groomed, hence hair would not only be long, but also well looked after with ‘nice hair/hairstyle’ (P44 HF20, P95 HF19, P127 HF20). Heterosexual women’s ‘haircuts tend to be more "girly" such as longer and more styled cuts’ (P79 HF21), and her hair will be ‘kept nicely’ (P107 HF19).

Heterosexual women were expected to be ‘manicured and wearing makeup that is complimentary’ (P58 HF19), and were anticipated to wear jewellery. P38 suggested that heterosexual women were ‘more likely to wear more ornate/ decorative earings as opposed to homosexual women who may just wear plain studs/hoops’ (P38 HM20), and similarly jewellery worn by heterosexual women would be ‘pretty’ (P104 HF23). Heterosexual women were expected to carry handbags and possibly other ‘accessories’ (P125 HF20), or ‘accessroies like jewellery, belts, a nice bag and nice shoes’ (P153 HF19). They also mentioned high heels, and as one participant phrased it ‘shoes chosen for style over comfort’ (P53 HF20), which contrasts directly to the lesbian who allegedly wears shoes chosen for comfort and practicality over style. In sum, the heterosexual woman was highly invested in her appearance, had long hair, feminine
clothes, (uncomfortable) high heeled shoes, with an end result that she is an
‘attractive’ and appropriately feminine woman.

Blokey blokes

Heterosexual men were predominantly and overwhelmingly written about as
masculine, therefore heterosexual men’s appearance had more in common with
lesbian appearance, than heterosexual women’s appearance.

The descriptions of heterosexual men often included the words ‘masculine’,
‘masculinity’, or ‘manly’. While heterosexual femininity was based on investment in
appearance, the requirement of heterosexual masculinity was about being
unconcerned with, and taking less care of, appearance (e.g., Frith & Gleeson, 2004).
P61 described heterosexual men as ‘not particularly bothered about their appearance,
and therefore probably a bit scruffy!’ (P61 HF19), a term also drawn on by others
(P107 HF19, P118 GM18). P139 stated that heterosexual men were ‘a mess’ (P139
HM19), hence this lack of care in appearance resulted in the man who was ‘maybe a
bit more untidy looking’ (P40 HF20) or ‘rough and ready’ (P47 HF20). The heterosexual
man did not put effort into how he looked, instead he had ‘thrown together
appearance’ (P26 HM19). P48 echoed this, and noted how heterosexual men are
distinctly different from gay men: ‘I don’t think they would look as “well put together”
as a gay man would’ (P48 HF20).

The masculine heterosexual man had a casual approach to appearance, reflected in
respondent’s descriptions of casual dress. He was often described as wearing ‘jeans +
t-shirt etc’ (P2 HF20). A lack of effort was apparent both in his dress and in the
maintenance of his clothes. The t-shirt was apparently ‘stained and not ironed’ (P45
HF19), and there was ‘lack of regard for state of shoes!’ (P130 HF22).

Heterosexual men’s clothes were often described in relation to sports. This perhaps
reflects how sport (particularly the specific sports referred to here) is viewed as a
masculine pursuit (Harris & Clayton, 2007), and therefore, the wearing of clothes that
are associated with sport can be understood as a portrayal of masculinity. P103
suggested he would be ‘wearing a rugby/football/surf shirt’ (P103 HF29), and others
suggested ‘sporty clothes’ (P38 HM20, P95 HF19), ‘sportswear’ (P42 HF21), ‘sports
trousers’ (P172 HF22), and ‘football shorts’ (P7, HF19). P127 wrote only: ‘Tracksuit
bottoms, trainers, football shirts’ (P127 HF20), and other participants though that heterosexual men would wear trainers (P56 HF19, P75 HM21, P79 HF21, P90 HF18, P103 HF29).

Heterosexual men’s lack of concern with appearance was also reflected in the lack of grooming expected of them. Heterosexual women had long groomed locks, whereas heterosexual men had short ungroomed hair cuts: ‘hair can vary but is often more messy and unkept’ (P41 HF20). Traditional gendered understandings within western culture traditionally associate short hair with men, and one participant suggested that the heterosexual male was ‘not comfortable with feminine associations e.g., long hair’ (P129 HF20). P57 suggested ‘no flamboyant haircuts’ (P57 HF18), which positions the heterosexual man as directly opposite to both the attractive heterosexual woman, and the flamboyant gay man.

Whereas heterosexual women (and to some extent gay men) were expected to care for their facial features through the application of make-up, heterosexual men need not do so. Further, although the participants did not make specific reference to the taken-for-granted practice of women’s hair removal (see Chapter Eight), they did comment on the existence of facial hair in men. Some mentioned ‘stubble’ or ‘facial hair’ (P38 HM20, P44 HF20), ‘unshaven face’ (P45, HF19), and ‘they may not be as clean shaven’ (P78 HF21), or perhaps even have a ‘beard’ (P130 HF22). One participant referred to men’s faces more generally, which she described as ‘rough/worn face blemishes, stubble and dry skin, big eyebrows’ (P56 HF19). P58 discussed hair more widely when she mentioned heterosexual men’s ‘facial and body hair’ (P58 HF19) and others agreed: ‘body hair evident’ (P75 HM21), ‘hair on body’ (P83 HF22). Here, once again, the heterosexual man is the opposite of heterosexual women, or gay men, who invest time in managing their facial and body hair.

However, a few of the women suggested that the heterosexual men were concerned with appearance, and that they were well groomed and well dressed, for example P7 thought that the heterosexual man ‘worries about the way they look’ (P7 HF19). These responses could be a reflection of ‘metrosexuality’. However, while this may be the
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case, it was not a term that was frequently used\textsuperscript{172}. Neither is metrosexuality as yet well researched, but it has been recognised in passing:

‘the trendsetting male icons of the 21\textsuperscript{st} century must combine the coercive strengths of Mars and the seductive wiles of Venus. Put simply, metrosexual men are muscular but suave, confident yet image-conscious, assertive yet clearly in touch with their feminine sides. Just consider British soccer star David Beckham. He is married to former Spice Girl Victoria “Posh” Adams, but his combination of athleticism and crossdressing make him a sex symbol to both women and men worldwide’ (Khanna, 2004:66)

Some acknowledged the possibility of metrosexuality blurring the rigid boundaries of gender and sexuality. P176 commented ‘with the new way of metrosexuality [which] has become more popular, [this] may make it harder for people to tell’ (P176 HF22), while P154 said:

‘you can sometimes tell an extreme looking gay person depending on their clothes & sub-cultural look - this is bullshit because you cannot define a gay woman/man by appearance anymore, especially in such a metrosexual society. Appearances are just an expression, sexuality shouldn’t play a part in it. Meaning if a guy’s trendy, wears good perfume, takes care of himself [this] does NOT mean he is a queer. Same goes with hetero, bi - whatever. We shouldn’t think too much about appearance if you want to play the ‘is he/she gay?’ game - if you want to define someones sexuality then try reading their body language a bit - even this can be misleading. People are often too quick to judge depending on the exterior. (P154 GM20)’.

Although rarely explicitly named as such, it could be that the influence of metrosexuality has played a part in broader understandings of heterosexual men’s appearance, whereby there has perhaps been a shift in what is expected (or accepted) of heterosexual men and their appearance. While metrosexuality may hold the potential to disrupt traditional gender boundaries, because metrosexual men engage in (subordinated, and consumer based) practices of appearance, they nonetheless

\textsuperscript{172}Out of 176 responses there were 4 references to metrosexuality: one reference was in the section on heterosexual men, another was in an answer to the question about lesbian appearance, and the final 2 were in relation to bisexual men.

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remain members of a wider hegemonic masculinity, which is part of wider patriarchal society (Khanna, 2004; Harris & Clayton, 2007).

There were a few responses which suggested that the heterosexual man negotiates how much effort he makes. One participant said he ‘may make an effort with certain aspects of his appearance however the details will usually be neglected - eg the outfit may not fully match or have clashing colours, scruffy shoes, hair unkempt’ (P53 HF20). These types of portrayals suggest that while heterosexual men might be concerned with appearance, they must ‘not appear to be concerned with their appearance’ (P3 HF20, emphasis added). This mirrors the findings of Frith and Gleeson’s (2004) findings when they spoke to heterosexual men about their clothing practices. Other students in this study agreed that the heterosexual man was ‘Not too groomed, [...]with] a good appearance but not immaculate’ (P58 HF19, emphasis added), or ‘quite laddish, not taking too much pride in appearance but generally some’ (P62 HF18). In sum, most suggested that heterosexual men did not care about appearance, while others suggested they valued it highly, and a few suggested that they may value their appearance but must not make it too apparent that they did so.
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4. Invisible Bisexuals

Whereas the students had clearly been able to provide distinct images of lesbians and gay men (despite their hesitance to do so), and of heterosexual men and women (despite struggling to do so), they were far less able to envisage what a bisexual person might look like. Further, although there was some distinction between bisexual men and women, it was less transparent in the data than in previous themes. Whereas, according to the participants, lesbians look markedly different from gay men, and heterosexual men are distinctly different from heterosexual women, this was not the case for bisexual people. The overarching story in the data was of bisexual people as invisible.

‘I don’t think there are any typical bi-sexuals’: Bisexuals as literally invisible

Participants reported an inability to answer the question, which many attributed to a distinct lack of stereotypes about either bisexual men’s, or bisexual women’s appearance, which contrasted with the widespread availability of stereotypes of lesbians and gay men:

‘I don’t think I would be able to recognise a bisexual woman from their appearance. Thinking of the bisexual women I know, there isn’t a particular typical look, and I am not aware of a stereotypical way of dressing for a bisexual woman’ (P46 HF33).

‘I think that a bisexual woman would have no distinctive factors about her appearance. Whereas there are quite stereotypical appearances for a gay man or a lesbian, I think that a bisexual woman would be hard to recognise. I could not describe how a bisexual woman would look’ (P64 HF19).

Several other participants also referred to the lack of bisexual visual stereotypes. P29 stated ‘I would not be able to describe a distinguished look. I don’t think there is a stereotype’ (P29 HF18), P50 said ‘I don’t think there are any stereotypical views for this!’ (P50 HF33), and P56 agreed: ‘I don’t know if I can describe a bisexual woman, I don’t even think that there is a stereotype that I can think of to describe either’ (P56 HF19). P115 believed that there was nothing that ‘as such would give it away for bisexuals’ (P115 HF19), revealing that bisexual people will not be ‘found out’ through their appearance, implying that other sexual identities ‘leak out’ of the body.
The most common way that the questions about bisexual appearance were answered, were in statements that the participants had ‘no idea’. P68 wrote ‘no idea how you would tell from looks??’ (P68 HF20). Many gave answers which indicated that if asked to recognise a bisexual person, they just ‘wouldn’t be able to’ (P72 HM19). P82 said ‘I don’t think you can recognise a bisexual woman straight away just from appearance’ (P82 HF20), and P121 said ‘I couldn’t recognise a bisexual man from their appearance’ (P121 HF23). Some provided answers which were concise, and to the point, for example, ‘? not a clue’ (P166 HF34), ‘I couldn’t’ (P142 HM19, P143 HM18).

Even the one participant who made it clear that they were trying to draw an image from a bisexual person that they knew (therefore from an experiential perspective), struggled to answer: ‘Hard to tell but my bisexual friend has zero dress sense’ (P137 HF20). One other participant made it clear that they were trying to call on who they knew, when they said ‘I’m not really aware of any bisexual men so I’m unsure’ (P3 HF20). These students may have been hindered, not only by the lack of norms for bisexual people, but also (as some of them professed) by not knowingly knowing any bisexual people themselves.

What the data clearly revealed was that for many students there was no way to describe how a bisexual person might be expected to look. This picture of the invisible bisexual is no surprise in light of previous research (e.g., Holliday, 1999; Taub, 1999; Clarke & Turner, 2007; Rothblum, 2010), and echoes the results of the interviews with bisexual women (Chapter Seven).

‘Personally i dont think there is an obvious way that bisexual women dress, its just like heterosexual women’: Bisexual women look like heterosexual women

Some participants suggested that bisexual people might ‘share’ a look with other sexual and social identities. The first of these was heterosexual ‘identity’ and this was evidenced above by P100 (HF20) in the quotation that provides the title of this subtheme, but also by frequent use of the term ‘normal’.

The ‘norm’ can be understood to be a reference to heterosexual people, because through the lens of heteronormativity, ‘normality’ is heterosexuality (e.g., Dyer, 1997; Ingraham, 2002; Jackson, 2006). Participants described bisexual women as ‘normal, i wouldn’t see them as different to anyone else’ (P39 HF21). A bisexual woman looks
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‘like a normal woman, no easy definition’ (P12 HM21), and similarly P35 felt that they ‘could not describe what a bisexual woman looks like, they look like everyone else’ (P35, HF18). The ‘everyone else’ here clearly refers to heterosexuals, and some participants explicitly stated that bisexual women looked like heterosexual women. P43 stated that bisexual women would look ‘just the same as a straight person’ (P43 HF18), P61 wrote ‘I would not describe their appearance any different to a heterosexual woman’ (P61 HF19), and P75 believed that bisexual women looked ‘no different to what a straight woman looks like. So fairly long hair, dressing feminine etc’ (P75 HM21).

One participant thought that bisexual women were ‘usually found kissing girls at house parties to turn on boys’ (P158 HF23), and some participants put forward that ‘Recently, it’s almost used as fashion statement, so many women may class themselves as bisexual, hence the difficulty in spotting’ (P38 HM20). These answers possibly reflect understandings which position bisexual women as ‘really straight’ and only ‘doing’ bisexuality to gain the attention of heterosexual men (e.g., Wilkinson, 1999a; Thompson, 2006; Diamond, 2005a; Barker, Bowes-Catton, Iantaffi, Cassidy & Brewer, 2008; Fairirington, 2008; also see, Chapter Three). P8 thought that ‘bisexuality is more of a fashion statement in that type of culture than actual bisexual desires’ (P8 HF19). If bisexuality is understood to be a fashion statement, then just as it is in fashion, it will go out of fashion. The parallel here is that bisexuality is only a passing phase, rather than an authentic identity position (see, Barker et al., 2008; Diamond, 2008; Fairirington, 2008; McLean, 2008b).

Participants did compare bisexual women with lesbians, for example ‘I would assume quite similar to a lesbian but perhaps to a lesser extent’ (P93 HF21), or ‘some elements of a lesbian but to a lesser and more subtle extent’ (P106 HF19). The bisexual woman then, was similar but not quite like a lesbian: ‘I would expect a bisexual woman to have similar masculine elements as a lesbian woman’ (P3 HF20), and ‘I would probably say it would be similar to the lesbian’s stereotype’ (P90 HF18). However, fewer participants thought that bisexual women looked like lesbians, than thought they might look like heterosexual women. Why this might be is difficult to ascertain. It may simply be a reflection of heteronormativity, but perhaps the ‘unattractive’ butch woman is not something that participants believed anyone would emulate.
Alternatively, it could be explained by mainstream understandings of bisexuality which
leave the impression that bisexual women are really heterosexual (as discussed above).

‘I would say that they had gay tendencies, that weren’t as obvious as gay men’: Bisexual men look a bit like gay men

Overall, it was more common for bisexual men to be assessed as looking a bit like gay men. One participant said of bisexual women’s appearance: ‘I would say that she would probably look like a straight woman and you wouldn’t be able to tell’ (P40 HF22), but of bisexual men’s appearance ‘I would think that they look more manly and well built but be a little bit camp’ (P40 HF22). P21 explicitly stated that a bisexual man would be ‘Similar to gay man, more so than bisexual woman looks like lesbian’ (P21 HF18), and P109 commented ‘I would say bisexual men’s appearance mirrors gay mens appearance more often (more so that bisexual women’s mirrors lesbian women’s)’ (P109 HF25).

This fits with notions that bisexual people are ‘a little bit gay’, hence the bisexual man will be a ‘watered down’ version of a gay man. The bisexual man is ‘a bit gay’ but not completely gay, exemplified by the quotation used as the title of this subtheme (P108 HF108). Similarly P17 wrote that bisexual men would look ‘more feminine than a heterosexual man’ (P17 HM20), and P49 wrote ‘slightly feminine appearance’ (P49 BF19, emphasis added).

The implication that bisexual men are a bit more feminine than gay men, but a bit less masculine than heterosexual men, places them at the ‘gayer’ ‘end of ‘the middle’ on an (imaginary) continuum of appearance. This mirrors theories of sexuality that place bisexuality ‘in the middle’ of homosexuality and heterosexuality (e.g., Kinsey, Pomeroy & Martin, 1948; Kinsey, Pomeroy, Martin & Gebhard, 1953). There was further evidence of this in the data: ‘some elements of a gay man but to a lesser and more subtle extent’ (P106 HF19), and P151 described the bisexual man as ‘a bit like a gay man, well dressed, dyed hair. tight jeans’ (P151 HF20). P161 believed that a bisexual man might be ‘More like a gay male - but might not care about his appearance as much’ (P161 BF20), hence he is not quite as inappropriately concerned with his appearance as gay men were perceived to be. Finally, P36 stated ‘I don’t think there would be any majorly distinctive differences in appearance - but perhaps slightly effeminate’ (P36 HM19, emphasis added).
That bisexual men were further towards the ‘gay end’ of the continuum fits with one drop notions of sexual identity, whereby even the smallest evidence of homosexuality must imply ‘an underlying homosexual orientation’ (Zinik, 1985:10). Certainly some participants perceived bisexual people as no different from gay men in their appearance. P139 described the bisexual man as ‘like a gay man’ (P139 HM19), as did P144 who commented ‘same as the gay man’ (P144 HF20). P9 stated that ‘they may look gay and just swing both ways’ (P9 HM22), and P38 said ‘bisexual men are usually similar in characteristics to the homosexual/gay men. so the same description applies here’ (P38 HM20). P41 implied that the bisexual man is chameleon like and changes his appearance according to context:

‘I think this person would wear smart clothes and have relatively well kept hair, I think this persons appearance would differ depending on where they were, eg if they were going to a gay club they may choose to wear more ‘typically’ gay clothes’ (P41 HF20).

P41’s description suggests that bisexuality is not essential and fixed, but a fluid identity, a malleable blending of heterosexuality and homosexuality. Therefore bisexual people are seemingly able to present their ‘gay’ side in gay space, and their ‘straight’ side in ‘straight’ space. This was a notion also presented by bisexual women who identified with a version of bisexuality as fluidity, which transcends, but ultimately upholds dichotomous binaries of sexuality (see Chapters Six and Seven).

Very few participants thought that bisexual men looked like heterosexual men, although a few did: ‘No different to any straight man. Wears the same sort of clothes, e.g., jeans, t-shirts, hoodies etc’ (P48 HF20), and ‘Not sure - same as straight’ (P153 HF19). However, the idea that bisexual people ‘look like’ heterosexual people, or like gay men and lesbians, maintains the invisibility of bisexuality because they are positioned as only able to ‘borrow’ the appearance norms of other sexual identities, rather than being able to own a distinct visual identity (see Chapter Seven).
‘Alternative non-confirmative’ bisexual people?

Bisexual people were also theorised to ‘borrow’ from other kinds of look: Goth, hippy, or any ‘alternative’ look. This was a particularly interesting finding in light of bisexual women’s recognition of a Goth look within bisexual communities (Chapter Seven).

One of the 7 bisexual participants in this survey linked bisexuality with alternative looks, and perhaps her comments were indicative of her insider status. She inherently linked the fluidity of bisexual appearance with the fluidity of bisexual identity (Diamond, 2005c, Chapters Six and Seven), and uses this to explain why there is no ‘bisexual look’:

‘I don’t have a typical image of a bisexual woman, I think it depends on the level of a person’s openness about their sexuality, from my experience many bisexual women I have met have been ‘Alternative’ - gothic cyber etc, so perhaps this would be my typical image. Again in my experience the bisexual men I have met have been more alternative/goth type people so this would be my typical view. I see bisexuality as a more fluid concept of sexuality so these men have been more fluid in their sexuality along with their dress sense (I hope this makes sense)’ (P4 BF21).

Her suggestion that the more ‘out’ a bisexual person is implies an ‘appearance identity dualism’ where to be ‘out’ is to let sexual identity ‘leak out’ of the body. This mirrors the idea that appearance is often assumed to be a vertical representation of identity (Riley & Cahill, 2005). However, most of the participants who identified these alternative looks were heterosexual. A few participants drew upon hippy, Goth, or alternative ways of looking as a possible clue to identifying someone as bisexual. The hippy bisexual was visualised as ‘free willed. Hippyish. Piercings’ (P31 HM20), and ‘wearing their own style of clothes’ (P34 HF18). This ‘hippy, care free and liberal looking woman. With long hair, lots of eye make-up and ‘flowing’ clothing like that of a hippy’s’ (P104 HF23) was also a ‘free spirit, [with] flowing clothes, bold’ (P35 HF18).

These understandings may represent bisexual people as free spirits, whose freedom in appearance reflects the fluidity and freedom of their bisexuality. This ‘freedom’ perhaps links with ‘free love’ and notions that bisexual people will have sex with ‘anything that moves’ (Israel & Mohr, 2004, Fairyington, 2008).
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‘Alternative’ was a word that the students also drew on, which resulted in similar images to that of the hippy bisexual: ‘alternative looking, strange haircuts or piercings’ (P98 HF18), ‘alternative. non-conformative’ (P129 HF20), with ‘dread locks […] nose ring?’ (P166 HF34) or ‘looks like a bit of an eccentric. Very colourful appearance. Wears expressive clothing’ (P19 HF19), or is perhaps just simply ‘non conformative’ (P129 HF20).

It seemed that being free of appearance norms/stereotypes allowed the bisexual woman to be ‘an individual’ who was ‘either kind of dark style (darkish clothes, piercings, dark hair - not necessarily Goth) or kind of hippyish/art type (long hair, individual style clothes etc)’ (P97 HF19). P97 thought that bisexual woman might be: ‘quite dark and mysterious I suppose - dyed hair maybe?’ (P97 HF19). Overall, these images presented bisexual people as ‘unconventional’, perhaps an indication of their ‘unconstrained’ sexuality. These freedoms can be interpreted as a positive representation of bisexual people as ‘individuals’ who have the confidence to cast aside fixed appearance norms. However, if bisexual people’s unconstrained appearance is linked with representations of bisexual people’s unconstrained, promiscuous, and risky sexual behaviour, then they may be condemned and stigmatised for their (alleged) non-normative practices, and for being considered to be risky sexual partners who are carriers of disease (e.g., Gamson, 1989; Sturgis, 1996; Spalding & Peplau, 1997; White, 2002, also see Chapter Three).

The students in this survey (more often than the bisexual women in the qualitative interviews), frequently drew on the ‘emo’ look in relation to bisexuality. This could be because the students were younger, and emo is a recent cultural phenomenon. Their descriptions included simply stating ‘emo’ (P27 HF18, P165 HM20), or as ‘emo/Indie looking individual’ (P118 GM18), and ‘emo - tight clothes. Black clothes’ (P157 HM20). The emo look was sometimes included in descriptions which also referred to other looks, for example, ‘possibly dressed in more of a Gothic/ alternative/emo way’ (P8 HF19), or ‘Gothic/Emo girls. Strippey full length socks. Doc Martins’ (P157 HM20). Due to the many conceptions of bisexual appearance as similar to that of other visual identities, the bisexual lacked clear definition, and remained invisible. I turn now to the final way in which bisexual appearance was conceptualised.
'Sort of a mix': The look in the middle of straight and gay

The final conceptualisation of bisexual visual identity was as 'in the middle' of homosexual and heterosexual 'looks', hence once again the findings mirrored those in Chapter Seven. However, it was difficult to ascertain whether they were convinced of this look, or whether it resulted from their uncertainty of what to write. For example, in many of their responses participants appeared to be thinking through their answer as they wrote: 'I honestly don't think there is a particular 'style' or even stereotype of what a bisexual woman would look like. She may dress more like a typical lesbian than a straight woman, but in general I don't think it would be easy to differentiate between a bisexual and straight woman' (PS3 HF20). Therefore, the participants may have come to a 'logical conclusion' about bisexual appearance through grappling with the possibilities.

P103 also weighed up the options: 'I would struggle to identify someone as bisexual from their appearance. Maybe someone who didn't look straight, but wasn't giving off lesbian cues either. I would maybe think that a woman was bisexual if I ruled out heterosexual and gay first' (P103 HF29). In these statements the bisexual woman is in the middle, not because she exists in this position, but because she doesn't exist in either a lesbian or heterosexual position. One interpretation of this could be that the students do not see bisexuality as an independent or valid identity position (Barker et al., 2008). Instead, they cannot decide whether to categorise bisexual people as 'like heterosexual' people, or 'like homosexual' people, in how they look. This 'look in the middle' then, echoes continuum models of sexual identity, whereby bisexuality occupies a middle position (see Chapters Three, Six, and Seven).

Other responses mirrored this theorisation of bisexual appearance, and a few participants were more confident in their assertions. P141 thought bisexual women might wear a 'bit of both of men + womens clothing' (P141 HM20), while P145 stated that it was 'not always as easy to tell. Sometimes a mixture of the two stereotypes put together' (P145 HF19). Bisexual women could have 'an equality of masculine and feminine traits. I always imagine them to wear boyfriend styled jeans with a tight top. Sort of a mix' (P45 HF19), and P49 suggested that bisexual women could be 'a mixture of masculine and feminine traits' (P49 BF19). In sum, bisexual women could be a 'mixture between a lesbian and a normal person?' (P156 HF18), or 'somewhere
inbetween a straight person and a lesbian’ (P161 BF20), but even this bisexual participant (who would supposedly ‘be in the know’) was unsure because ‘they could look like anything?’ (P161 BF20).

To conclude, the students struggled to articulate a concrete image of either bisexual men or women. Bisexual people remained invisible, either through looking like gay men and lesbians, heterosexual men and women or hippys, Goths, and emos. If they did not look like ‘someone else’ then they were an intangible ‘mix’, or ‘in the middle’, of these identities.

**Discussion**

In the results of this survey it was clear that lesbians and gay men were understood by these (mainly heterosexual) students to disrupt traditional understandings of female femininity and male masculinity in how they dressed and appeared. This defiance of traditional gender binaries may mean that gay men, and particularly butch lesbians, become ‘othered’ and presented as inappropriate. These contemporary understandings also mirrored the inversion theories of early sex researchers such as Richard von Krafft-Ebing and Henry Havelock Ellis. This was evident when students positioned butch lesbians as akin to heterosexual men in their appearance, but as opposite to heterosexual women; and when gay men were described as similar to heterosexual women, but as opposite to heterosexual men (e.g., Krafft-Ebing, 1886/1997; 1903; Ellis, 1897/1999; 1906/2001). This reflects how history may provide the foundations of contemporary understandings of particular phenomena.

These findings also supported research from the 1970s/1980s (e.g., Weissbach & Zagon, 1975; Nyberg & Alston, 1977a; 1977b Laner & Laner, 1980), which indicates that students’ understandings of appearance have progressed very little from those of students thirty or forty years ago. This perhaps suggests that liberal discourses have done little to advance progress in understanding sexual identity, because assimilationist strategies of political change have seemingly left students denying difference, and accepting good gays, but stigmatising bad gays (e.g., Smith, 1994; Taulke-Johnson, 2008; 2010).

That these students were able to describe a visual image of (butch) lesbians and (middle class, effeminate) gay men, reiterates the importance of researching and
understanding the benefits and risks of being recognisable through distinct appearance norms and visual identities (see Chapters One, Two, Six, Seven and Eight). It was unsurprising to find that these heterosexual students were unable to provide nuanced accounts of the subtleties of lesbian and gay appearance. Often appearance is not only about what is worn, but also how it is worn, or what accessories are worn with it, and in what location on the body (Kaiser, 1998; Clarke & Turner, 2007). That the students are unaware of the specificities of lesbian and gay appearance suggests that there are ways in which sexual identity can be signalled to others through appearance without making it apparent to (most) heterosexual people (e.g., Winn & Nutt, 2001; Krakauer & Rose, 2002; Clarke & Turner, 2007). This can enable them to reap the benefits of shared identity, without placing themselves as at risk of verbal or physical abuse.

The findings of this survey contribute novel understandings of bisexual appearance. They offer an opportunity to consider beliefs about bisexual appearance in relation to descriptions of lesbian and gay men’s appearance. Whereas students were able to describe an image of lesbians, gay men, and heterosexual people, it was clear that bisexual people were invisible to them. Bisexual men and women were seen mainly as only able to ‘borrow’ appearance norms from lesbians, gay men, or heterosexual people, or from hippy and Goth identities, hence were conceived of as entirely invisible in their appearance, and lacking their own appearance norms. However, rather interestingly, the mention of ‘alternative looks’ echoes the findings of the interviews with bisexual women. This suggests that despite a lack of tangibility, a bisexual visual identity may be (undetectably) located somewhere within wider ‘alternative looks’.

The participants also revealed their heteronormative positions, and struggled to consider that heterosexual people may be recognisable through appearance. When they did provide descriptions of appearance, it was clear that they saw distinct boundaries between gendered bodies, which meant that women were seen as required to heavily invest in their appearance which would result in an appropriately attractive and feminine female (e.g., Blackman & Perry, 1990; Toerien & Wilkinson, 2003). Men were expected to be less concerned with their appearance, which would result in a scruffy masculine man (e.g., Frith & Gleeson, 2004).
Peel (2010) has argued that it is useful to encourage those who occupy normative sexuality (e.g., heterosexuality) to reflect upon their own position. By encouraging students to recognise and comment upon their own heterosexuality I hope that the students finished the survey more aware of its normative position. If this was not the case then perhaps they were at least prompted to think about the often taken-for-granted concepts, such as appearance, and the part they play in all of our identities.
A discussion and conclusion of researching bisexual women's visual identities

This final chapter offers a summary of the main research findings and their implications, before moving to a consideration of the key contributions that this thesis makes to interdisciplinary appearance research, and to feminist and LGBTQ psychology. It then includes a reflective section on the process of undertaking the thesis, with reference to the strengths and limitations of the research program. The chapter ends with a discussion of the implications of the findings, and suggestions for future research.

Summary of findings:

The key theme which clearly runs throughout this thesis is the invisibility of bisexual women and their identities and visual identities and in this brief summary of research I refer back to each chapter, and to the aims of this research in order to frame an overview of the findings.

The first aim was to review existing literature in order to investigate how bisexuality is represented within western culture, and in the psychological and social sciences literature. These literature reviews, which I discussed in Chapters One, Two and Three, revealed that bisexual women have been underrepresented within these locations, and are therefore mainly invisible within western culture and the social sciences. This was partly due to the minimal theory or research which exists on the topic of bisexual people and their identities. When bisexuality has had a presence it has most commonly been conceptualised as an inauthentic identity. Often this is through the suggestion that bisexual people are indecisive and cowardly fence-sitters, and that bisexuality is a temporary and confused stage between straight and gay. Alternatively, bisexual people are positioned as greedy, promiscuous, sex-obsessed and diseased, or as women who are 'really' heterosexual but are seeking the attention of heterosexual men. However, the literature which conceives of bisexuality in these ways does not include the perspectives of bisexual people.

What came to light during the interviews with bisexual women (reported in Chapters Six and Seven) was that these women were both aware of, and frustrated
with, these negative conceptualisations of bisexuality. They drew attention to how, in their experience, bisexual people were (mis)fitted, and bisexuality was (mis)represented and (mis)understood. They were keen to make known that their (varied) versions of bisexuality were very different to the negative conceptualisations that are widely available in western culture (and the social sciences) and therefore to the ways in which others seemingly understood bisexual identity. This made them feel that representations of bisexuality which reflected their own understandings of their sexuality did not exist, and that therefore that a valid version of bisexual identity was conceptually invisible. This was one of the first studies to explore how bisexual women experience their identities, and the prominence which they gave to the topics of stigmatisation, invisibility, and biphobia indicates that more research is required to further unpick the lived realities of bisexual woman in order to understand their experiences of existing within an identity which is both undervalued and invisible within western culture, where dichotomous understandings of sexuality reign supreme. This has important implications for scholars of psychology and sociology who must ensure that they meaningfully include bisexual people in their theory and research. This would allow bisexuality to be represented through the lens of bisexual people, which when reported could enable psychology, social science, and eventually western culture more broadly, to move beyond purely negative and overly simplistic representations of bisexuality.

The second aim of this research was to gain a greater understanding of how bisexual women manage their bodies and appearance in relation to their bisexuality. There was very little existing research or theory which specifically considered bisexual women’s body image, appearance practices, or visual identities, often because they had been entirely overlooked or omitted from existing research (see, Chapters One and Eight). The little research which did exist indicated that bisexual women’s dress and appearance practices may be contradictory and complex, in part because their visual identity may change according to the gender of their current partner(s). These bisexual women’s discussions of their dress and appearance revealed that they believed that bisexuality was not only conceptually invisible, but also literally invisible. While they described lesbian sexuality and heterosexuality as able to be visually represented and recognisable on and through
the body, they did not believe that was the case for bisexuality. Therefore they felt that they were unable to effectively express or embody their (bi)sexuality.

I investigated this further when I developed the Appearance and Sexual Identity Questionnaire (ASIQ) in order to meet my next aim, which was to explore how bisexual, lesbian, and heterosexual women manage their bodies and appearance. This allowed me to contextualise bisexual appearance in relation to other sexual identities by drawing comparisons between these groups. There were a number of significant differences between the scores of bisexual women in comparison to the scores of either lesbian and/or heterosexual women, as reported in Chapter Eight. The theme of bisexual invisibility continued here. The bisexual women had the lowest scores (and lesbian women the highest) on scales which measured the expression and recognition of sexual identity, and these results indicated that bisexual women felt unable to express or recognise a bisexual visual identity. There were also significant differences between how strongly the women identified with feminism, and in how they reported investing in femininity, managing their body hair and wearing make-up. This is particularly interesting and important because it provides empirical evidence that bisexual women are not the same as heterosexual women, or lesbian women. This means that bisexual women must be included in research in order to further our understandings of bisexuality. Critically, bisexual women's results must be analysed and discussed independently of heterosexual or lesbian women’s results, because to amalgamate bisexual women with women of other sexualities is to risk inaccurate results, which could potentially invalidate research, as well as perpetuating the invisibility of bisexuality.

My final aim was to explore whether heterosexual young people recognise appearance norms in relation to sexuality, and what this might tell us about bisexual visual identity specifically. The students who participated were able to (reluctantly) describe the ‘typical’ appearance of (butch) lesbians and (effeminate) gay men in ways which broadly mirrored and supported the existing LGBTQ literature reported elsewhere in this thesis. They were also able to provide a ‘traditionally gendered’ picture of heterosexual men and women. However, in contrast these participants were unable to present any images of bisexual men and women indicating that bisexual visual identities are invisible to heterosexual people.
This research has made an important contribution in identifying empirical findings which demonstrate some of the ways in which bisexuality is both theoretically, conceptually, and literally invisible within psychology, social science, and western culture more broadly. Bisexuality was invisible, even to bisexual women who occupy a bisexual identity. These findings raise a number of issues around bisexual women’s lack of visibility, and the (lack of) validation of bisexuality more widely. The overarching aim of this thesis was to consider the specificity of bisexual women’s (visual) identities and appearance, in order to achieve a broader understanding of bisexual women’s visual identities. It is clear from the knowledge which has been gained that this aim has been met, and that this thesis has been able to make a unique contribution to informing appearance research, and feminist and LGBTQ psychology. I now move to detailing the contribution that this thesis has made to each of these specific areas.

Key contributions to appearance research, and feminist and LGBTQ psychology

Contributions to appearance research

Broadly speaking, the psychological literature on appearance has tended to be focused on disfigurement, and body image and size, and much of the research in this area has been implicitly (unintentionally) heteronormative in its approach (see, for example, Cash & Pruzinsky, 2002; Strahan, Spencer & Zanna, 2007). Those studies that have considered matters of body and appearance in relation to sexuality, have mainly focused on heterosexual and lesbian women (e.g., Dellinger & Williams, 1997; Guy & Banim, 2000; Krakauer & Rose, 2002), but rarely on bisexual women (with the exceptions of Holliday, 1999; Taub, 1999; Clarke & Turner, 2007; Rothblum, 2010).

Critically, by focusing specifically on bisexual women, this thesis has contributed to appearance research by producing (quantitative and qualitative) empirical findings which show that bisexual women have distinct experiences of their visual identities, different from either lesbian or heterosexual women. This indicates that those who research appearance must strive to move beyond heteronormativity and mononormativity, and be aware of their participant’s sexual identities, and the ways in which they shape and inform research findings.
This thesis has also shown that despite their distinct experiences of their identities, bisexual women do not have access to particular appearance norms that allow them to create and present a visual identity that is distinct from either heterosexual or lesbian women. The women’s talk showed that they were mindful of their bisexuality in relation to how they dressed and appeared, which indicated that they were attempting to express their bisexuality, despite the lack of visual codes available for them to do so. This sometimes led to them rejecting what they perceived to be (feminine) heterosexual and (masculine) lesbian ‘looks’. The ways in which they spoke of their dress and appearance sometimes resonated with how they conceived of their wider bisexual identity, even if they did not explicitly make (or necessarily recognise) these links. For example, in Chapters Six and Seven, I described how some of the women positioned their bisexual identities and their visual identities, as ‘in the middle’, or as a mix of, lesbian and heterosexual looks. Other bisexual participants described their bisexuality as fluid and free of constraints, which was mirrored in their understandings that they had particular freedoms in how they dressed and appeared. However, the lack of available bisexual appearance norms left these bisexual women with no look which they could embrace, which meant that they were unable to construct a visual identity which could convey their sexual identity, or allow them to be read as bisexual women by others, which left them feeling invisible within wider western culture.

In Chapter Two I drew on a wide range of literature in order to demonstrate the existence, and history, of lesbian visual sexual identities, in contrast to the invisibility of bisexual visual identities. This highlighted the intrinsic link between women’s appearance and their sexuality and lived realities. In doing so, I was also able to bring appearance from the background to the foreground of the literature. In making appearance the primary focus of my discussion, I offered a unique and original contribution to the psychological literature, by focusing on the integral part that appearance and visibility has to both to individual identities and collective communities and cultures. This also provides a useful addition to the wider body of multidisciplinary appearance literature, and to lesbian and gay psychology.

**Contributions to feminist research**

In the introduction I discussed how feminist approaches have been critical of mainstream (or ‘malestream’) psychology for being representative of mainly men’s
experiences (e.g., Stanley & Wise, 1990; Stanley & Wise, 1993; Wilkinson, 2001; Hall, 2004; Kitzinger, 2004). However, feminist psychologists have often represented the experiences of white, middle class, and heterosexual women (e.g., Crenshaw, 1993; Kitzinger, 1996; Clarke & Peel, 2007b). In turn, as discussed in Chapter One, this has meant that bisexual women have often been excluded from contemporary feminist psychological research, and this thesis has made a contribution by challenging their exclusion. The findings from the interviews with bisexual women demonstrated the importance of ensuring that bisexual women are included in feminist research: these bisexual women used the opportunity of being ‘given a voice’ in order to draw attention to the invisibility and stigmatisation which they experienced as a result of multiple ‘biphobic’ understandings of their identity. Therefore this research has made a significant contribution to feminist psychology, through its focus specifically on the experiences of bisexual women. This has produced deeper and more nuanced understandings of bisexual women’s lived experience, with particular reference to appearance and visual identity, as well as in relation to their identities more widely.

It has often been feminist authors who have recognised the importance of appearance in expressing self and identity, and as having important social and political meanings, particularly within an oppressive and patriarchal society (e.g., Davis, 1992; Bordo, 1993; Ainley, 1995; Entwistle, 2000; Guy and Banim, 2000; Frith, 2003; Frith & Gleson, 2003; Blood, 2005). Broadly speaking, these findings have also contributed to feminist research by demonstrating that mainstream norms around beauty practices such as body hair removal, make-up use, and wider femininity remain prevalent. Therefore, this thesis contributes further support to a growing body of literature around the potentially harmful effects of beauty and appearance norms (e.g., Brownmiller, 1984/1986; Chapkis, 1986; Blackman & Perry, 1990; Tseelon, 1995; Kitzinger & Wilmott, 2002; Jeffreys, 2005).

**Contributions to LGBTQ psychology**

In part through its invisibility, bisexuality has not always been perceived as a valid sexual identity (e.g., Bowes-Catton, 2007; Barker & Langridge, 2008). As I described in Chapters One and Three, bisexual men and women have often been excluded from the psychological LGBTQ literature, and there is minimal research which focuses specifically on bisexual women, particularly from a U.K. perspective.
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Chapter Ten: A discussion and conclusion of researching bisexual women’s visual identities

My findings show that there are a number of ways in which this group of British bisexual women understood their sexual identity. A key commonality across all the women’s responses was their understandings of bisexual people as misfits, and of bisexuality as (mis)understood and (mis)represented within mainstream society and popular culture. My research shows that the (monosexual and mononormative) context in which bisexual people live their lives, is one that dismisses and invalidates their existence (e.g., Namaste, 1996b; Hemmings, 2002; Petford, 2003; Fish, 2006). The women’s discussion of how they felt stigmatised makes a significant contribution to (the small body of) existing research on bisexual identity, and opens up a number of possibilities for where future research (see below) can focus in order to unpick this invisibility further.

My review of the sexological, psychological, and social scientific research was useful in building a history of how bisexuality has been conceptualised. It was clear that from this review of the literature that contemporary understandings of bisexuality, both within psychology, and the wider culture, are predominantly underpinned by dichotomous understandings of sexual identity, which position heterosexual and homosexual as the only possible identity positions. This invalidates bisexual identity and leads to it being dismissed and overlooked. Binary understandings of sexual identity were arguably first established by sexologists in the 1800s (e.g., Ellis, 1897; Kraft-Ebing, 1886/1997). Critically, it was clear throughout this thesis that these early understandings have formed the foundations of how (bi)sexual identity has been understood ever since. That these sexological theories from the past provided the underpinnings of how identity is conceptualised in the present, demonstrates the importance of considering historical perspectives when conducting psychological research. To examine history can offer important insights into how contemporary understandings of particular phenomena are likely to be built upon historical foundations (also see, Storr, 1999; Angelides, 2001; Gammon & Isgro, 2006).

My findings also contribute to LGBTQ psychology in providing further empirical evidence to show that bisexual women are a distinct category of individuals, who feel stigmatised within both mainstream heterosexual society and within LGBT spaces (e.g., McLean, 2008a; 2008b). This research was able to offer specific examples of how these British bisexual women feel that the ‘LGBTQ umbrella’ does not always meaningfully
include them (see, for example, Clarke & Peel, 2007b for theoretical discussions of this point).

My research also contributed to debates within (and beyond) LGBTQ psychology about the limitations of liberal humanistic discourses for making sense of LGB identities (e.g., Brickell, 2001; Clarke, 2005; Ellis, 2009). For example, the results of the qualitative survey indicated that student’s valued individualistic, liberal humanistic accounts of identity. A small body of qualitative research has demonstrated the subtle ways in which heterosexual people are (unsurprisingly) unlikely to be openly prejudicial, but nonetheless hold heteronormative views of the world (e.g., Speer & Potter, 2000; Clarke, 2005). My research has contributed to this developing body of work by highlighting how the students who took part used the strategy of drawing upon stereotypes as disclaimers, which indicates that they feared that they might be viewed as prejudicial. These students had only limited understandings of lesbian and gay identity, which was apparent in their equating equality with sameness, and difference with deviance (Kitzinger, 1987; Brickell, 2001; Stacey & Biblarz, 2001; Hicks, 2005). This is an important contribution, and highlights that further research and theorising could be beneficial in increasing understandings of LGBTQ identities with mainstream heterosexual culture, and in developing strategies which aim to move away from discourses and politics which result in division between appropriate (good gay) and inappropriate (bad gay) (e.g., Smith, 1994; Taulke-Johnson, 2010) interpretations of lesbian and gay (and bisexual and trans) identities.

This research, which included bisexual women who were involved in bisexual communities, is one of the first studies to consider wide ranging matters of appearance specifically in relation to bisexual identity and bisexual communities. My research has therefore made a unique contribution to LGBTQ psychology literature by placing bisexuality at the top of the research agenda, which in turn evidenced that bisexual women experience their (visual and wider sexual) identities in ways which are distinct from lesbian (or heterosexual) identity. Therefore, it is critical that LGBTQ research acknowledges the importance of meaningful inclusion in its approach to research.
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Chapter Ten: A discussion and conclusion of researching bisexual women’s visual identities

Conducting the research

The recruitment process

Strengths

The overall large sample of nearly 500 women in the Appearance and Sexual Identity Questionnaire (ASIQ), is a key indicator that combining a number of strategies, and making research available on the Internet can work well in terms of recruiting a sizable sample of participants. Critically, doing so resulted in a sample of bisexual women large enough that their data could be analysed separately from lesbian and heterosexual women’s responses. This meant that specific focus could be given to bisexual women’s experiences of bodies and appearance practices, which makes a considerable contribution to LGBTQ and mainstream psychology because specific attention is rarely given to this group. Instead, as discussed in Chapter Eight, bisexual women are either amalgamated with heterosexual or lesbian women, or completely excluded from the research. However, my findings showed that this is not an appropriate strategy to employ, because bisexual women may often have experiences that are distinct from that of members of other sexual identities.

The recruitment strategies I chose in this research were ones which are common within LGBTQ studies (e.g., Fish, 1999; Harding & Peel, 2007; Rothblum, 2007), and they proved to be an effective way in which to recruit. For example, in the ASIQ relatively large samples sizes (over 100 lesbian, and nearly 100 bisexual women) were achieved. This is particularly relevant in identifying that these methods can be effective when trying to find hidden populations (e.g., Fish, 1999; Harding & Peel, 2007; Rothblum, 2007).

All too often research recruits from LGBT community spaces (see, for example, in depth discussion of the challenges of recruiting hidden populations in Fish, 1999; Clarke, Ellis, Peel & Riggs, 2010). For the interviews with bisexual women, the recruitment strategies meant that many of the women were not members of bisexual communities. This is a strength of my research, because as my analysis showed (see, Chapter Six), there were differences in how the women understood their own and other people’s (visual and wider) identities which appeared to map onto whether they were members of LGBT and/or bisexual communities.
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The recruitment strategy used in the qualitative survey was extremely straightforward, and by drawing on my location within a university setting I was able to quickly and easily recruit a large sample of students.

Limitations of the samples

One key weakness of my research lies in the fact that the majority of participants who took part in this research were white, middle class, able bodied, and well-educated, hence my findings reflect the experiences of only a very particular group of predominantly ‘privileged’ bisexual, lesbian, and heterosexual men and women. Another weakness of my recruitment strategy was that despite hoping to include trans and queer people (both of whom are considerably under researched), not enough participants who identified as such took part, which indicates that trans people may not be located within the LGBT spaces from which I recruited for the ASIQ. Alternatively, trans people may be reluctant to participate in psychological research. This suggests that if psychologists wish to conduct research with trans people, then they must consider carefully why trans people may not wish to take part in research, and plan purposive recruitment strategies. It is important for psychologists to consider that members of marginalised social groups are not obligated to take part in research, and that to move forward and increase understandings of trans people may require some considerations of how they do, or do not benefit from taking part in research.

The methods

Strengths

My feminist qualitative approach proved to be a powerful strategy within this research because, as discussed in Chapter Six, it allowed these bisexual women to introduce pertinent discussions of their experiences of (mis)understandings and (mis)representations of their identities which may otherwise have been overlooked by psychologists. These findings made a considerable contribution to increasing understandings of bisexual women’s perspectives on bisexual (visual) identities.

The photographs provided an innovative method in order to aid in the data collection process of my research. An unanticipated strength of the photographs was that they resulted in participants effectively ‘preparing’ for the interview, by thinking about and reflecting upon their appearance. I believe this was useful, because it may have
overcome the challenges of talking about a difficult topic (Curry & Strauss 1994, Hurworth, 2003), which bisexual visual identity was anticipated to be (Clarke & Turner, 2007). Some participants expressed their enjoyment of the photograph task, and in some interviews the participants seemed to enjoy using their photographs as a springboard to direct their discussions of bisexual appearance and identity (Heisley & Levy, 1991; Frith, Riley, Archer, and Gleeson, 2005). Therefore, a strength of the visual aspect of this research is in the way in which the photographs enabled a more participant led interview (e.g., Hurworth, 2003), which corresponded with my feminist approach.

The Appearance and Sexual Identity Questionnaire (ASIQ) generated a range of interesting findings, in particular highlighting bisexual women’s distinctiveness, but also providing insight into how bisexual, lesbian, and heterosexual women manage their bodies and their appearance. The findings fit with the scientific model of mainstream psychology, and can therefore be disseminated to mainstream psychologists. I hope that by publishing my research in academic journals, the findings will inform other researchers about the specific and distinct experiences of bisexual women, and the importance of including and recognising them and their identities. I hope that in turn, my drawing attention these issues might positively influence how psychologists prioritise, conceptualise, and research bisexuality.

Mixed-methods proved successful in contextualising how bisexual women not only conceive of themselves as somewhat invisible, but are also conceived by others as entirely invisible (see, Chapters Seven and Nine). Taking a sequential approach to mixing methods (e.g., Driscoll, Appiah-Yeboah, Salib & Rupert, 2007) worked well, and I was able to gain both depth in the qualitative phases of the research, and breadth in the quantitative phases. The data generated by the qualitative survey was far thinner but more focused than in the interviews which made it easier to analyse (but also less rich in content).

Limitations

The interviews were lasted longer than anticipated, and conducting them, particularly when I widened my recruitment strategies to include women from the bisexual community who lived further away, was time consuming. Despite the length of the interviews, the data which was produced did not always flow well, and therefore was
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sometimes ‘bitty’ and not always rich in content. I believe that this was a reflection of the difficulty that the women had in talking about how they related their bisexual identity to their appearance (Clarke & Turner, 2007). It may also indicate that the photographs were perhaps an interruption rather than an aid within some of these interviews. Furthermore, a limitation of the photographs was that the women often presented existing pictures of themselves in various different clothes. These tended to provide only limited discussion, focused on what they wore, which was interesting, but I was keen to move the discussion beyond specific items of clothing, to consider how their dress and appearance did (or did not) relate to their bisexual identity. This may be a reflection that the method worked less well in some interviews than in others.

A few of the women, particularly those who were not involved with bisexual communities, mentioned that they had found the photograph task challenging, because they were unsure of how to take pictures which related to their bisexual identity. Their feedback concerned me, because I wanted participants to enjoy taking part, rather than worry about the task. However, others had enjoyed including photographs, and so I chose to make some minor alterations to the photograph information sheet, which reiterated to the women that the task was not something that I wanted them to feel worried about, or under pressure to complete.

When conducting the ASIQ I found the tools limiting, and the notion of reducing people to numbers frustrating. One limitation of the ASIQ was its reliance on the use of surveys specifically developed during this research. Thus was due to issues with availability of appropriate questionnaires within psychology.

Although the Internet was a useful tool to utilise, and may have made recruitment and data collection easier than it might otherwise have been, the strategy of using an online version of the questionnaire may have been a barrier to some, who do not have access to, or are unfamiliar with, the Internet (Harding & Peel, 2007; Flowers, 2009; Jowett & Peel, 2009). This may have perpetuated my gaining a sample composed of largely ‘the usual suspects’ (e.g., white, well educated, and middle class participants), and future researchers who utilise Internet could consider doing so alongside other methods.

In Chapter Eight I discussed the representativeness of the sample that was recruited for the ASIQ. It is also important to consider the (lack of) generalisability of the results.
from the interviews with bisexual women and the qualitative survey with (mainly) heterosexual students about sexuality and appearance.

The bisexual women who participated in the interviews were mainly white, middle class, able bodied, well-educated, in employment, and ‘out’ about their sexuality (see Chapter Six and Appendix 1). This indicates that overall the sample lacks diversity, and means that the findings cannot be generalised to all bisexual women. Participants who self identify as bisexual are a hard to find population, and to recruit a sample large and diverse enough to make claims about the transferability of the findings would have been a further logistical challenge, and one which falls outside the scope of this (or many other) qualitative research projects. However, efforts were made to gain a range of participants, and not all women fell within the over represented categories referred to above. Further, the women differed in the types of communities in which they were involved (e.g., LGB, specifically bisexual communities, or none), their age, and in how long they had identified as bisexual. Additionally, it is important to acknowledge that the results of my analyses were located within existing literature, and often supported previous research, which in itself adds weight to the credibility of the findings. It is clear that through identifying themes, there were some general patterns of meaning which could be found across participants within this data. Despite these features, no claims can be made regarding the generalisability of these results. It is important that researchers continue to strive to undertake research with a range of participants, ideally those who fall outside ‘the usual suspects’ of psychology research. Nonetheless, as an under researched population, it could be argued that bisexual women in themselves fall outside the usual suspects, and despite the limitations of the sample, the findings nonetheless make a number of important theoretical and psychological contributions.

In relation to the qualitative survey, once again, no claims can be made regarding the generalisability of the findings. A sample of (mainly psychology) students were specifically chosen, as a convenience sample, in order to gain the perspectives of heterosexual young people. These participants were mainly white, able bodied, middle class, heterosexual females, aged between 18 and 21, and all of them studied at the same university. However, some were working class and non-heterosexual (see Chapter Nine). This is clearly a very particular sample, which
offers some foundations for future research, which could move beyond student populations, and would be beneficial in furthering understandings of heterosexual perceptions of (sexuality and) appearance.

Finally, it is important to reflect upon the problematic nature of how to ask questions. Despite having piloted the survey, it was challenging to ask a clear question about appearance and sexuality without ‘requesting’ stereotypes. Some psychology students pointed this out in their responses. P31 wrote ‘questions like this will lead people to answer with the stereotype but when asked to really think about it I’m sure most people will think they mean little’ (P31, HM20), and P112 felt that ‘the questions are trapping me into describing a stereotype, which I believe represents the minority’ (P112, HM27). These responses indicate that engaging psychology students in research recruits a very particular population who have a critical awareness of methods and methodology. It also shows how important it is to ensure that questions are carefully designed.

Reflections on my part in the research as a bisexual woman

My interest and motivation in studying bisexual women’s (in)visibility was in part due to my own life experiences of my bisexuality. I was keen to explore how bisexual women understood their own visual and bisexual identity, and how they conceived of other people’s visual and sexual identities. Therefore, my understandings of these topics will have inevitably shaped and informed my attempts to give the women a ‘voice’. Over the course of my research I also became increasingly motivated to contribute to producing some kind of social change for individual bisexual women and bisexual communities. Early into my second year I chose to advertise the questionnaire in a local magazine *The Spark*. Their classified sub-section was titled *Gay and Lesbian*. During making arrangements for the advert, I asked that they change the section title to include ‘bisexual’. While they chose to maintain the order as beginning with gay (so that it did not affect where in the order of the listings it appeared), nonetheless they did alter the name of the classified section to *Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual*. However small a victory this may be, it was a step forward in acknowledging, and raising the visibility of, bisexuality.
Part Three

Chapter Ten: A discussion and conclusion of researching bisexual women’s visual identities

Reflecting on being an ‘insider’

Bisexual women, in part precisely due to their having less clear community and support groups, were a ‘hard to find’ population. Had I not been bisexual I would have been less likely to have had as many friends whose bisexuality I was aware of, or known about Bicon and Bi Community News (BCN). Therefore, my status as an ‘insider’ bisexual woman made recruitment easier because I knew where to look for participants (e.g., Labaree, 2002; LaSala, 2003). It seems likely that access problems would have been greater for a non-bisexual researcher, and there is some evidence of this in how much harder I found it to recruit members of bisexual communities, of whom I was only a recent member. In this sense, I was in some ways an outsider when I approached women who socialise within these spaces. Further, a comment from a bisexual woman at Bicon, indicated that these types of communities may be suspicious of psychologists, due to a belief that psychology misrepresents bisexual people and their identities. Therefore, I believe that an outsider (lesbian or heterosexual) researcher may have found it less straightforward to engage bisexual women.

The bisexual women who participated were keen to have their voices heard, and the interview data reflects how the women were aware of our shared bisexuality, which suggests that it was partly because I am bisexual that they were willing to talk to me (e.g., Bridges, 2001; Labaree, 2002; LaSala, 2003; Perry et al., 2004). Further, I found it easy to build rapport with my participants, and they all seemed willing to share their experiences with me (e.g., Platzer & James, 1997; Labaree, 2002; LaSala, 2003), and appeared to enjoy taking part in the research.

I was mindful of my position as an insider, and appreciated its advantages while also trying to compensate for the potential drawbacks. For example, one potential issue with conducting insider research is that the researcher may inadvertently assume that their own cultural experiences will be similar to that of their participants, and therefore they may not pursue any vague statements that participants make (Kanuha, 2000). Through reading the insider/outsider literature (e.g., Griffith, 1998; Kanuha, 2000; Kong, Mahoney & Plummer, 2002; LaSala, 2004) before I conducted these interviews, I was able to be vigilant in considering the challenges associated with an insider position. For example, I actively monitored incidents of ‘shared knowledge’
during the interviews (e.g., Kanuha, 2000). Here, Emily (accurately) assumed that I would have an awareness of the way in which some lesbians carry themselves:

Emily: (It's the, the lesbian being butch walk, it's the like confident, butch lesbian and that's how they walk and do their swagger (laughs) [...]

Nikki: Mm. You mentioned the swagger earlier as well. (Laughter) Can you describe it for me?

Emily: (Laughs)

Nikki: I mean, I think I know what you mean, but can you to describe it for me?

Emily: (laughs) Oh, how can you describe it? It's erm (6 second pause) I think it's that confidence of revelling in something that's (5 second pause) I don't know, they're not, it's not an act I don't think, to do it, for them ... but it's learned, for the most part it's learned ... (P3, Emily).

It was clear that without my prompt Emily would not have elaborated on the 'lesbian swagger' (e.g., Esterberg, 1996a). This quotation provides an example of how I sought to clarify participant's narratives, rather than assuming that we had a shared understanding. Overall, I felt that being an insider was an advantageous position, and through monitoring how research is conducted I have evidenced that it may be possible to alleviate some of the problematic implications of an insider perspective.

**Issues of Intersectionality within insider research**

I developed a far greater awareness of my (privileged) position as a white and middle class woman while conducting this research, Feminist researchers must continue to strive to recognise and reflect upon the intersections of gender, sexuality, class and ethnicity that interrupt notions of 'shared identities (e.g., Crenshaw, 1993; Fish, 2008). Further, those doing insider research must similarly consider their positions carefully and not make simplistic assumptions regarding whether they are different from, or similar to their participants (e.g., Fish, 2008).
The implications of this research for psychologists and researchers

My initial research question related to how bisexuality has been represented within psychological literature. My review of the literature extended beyond psychology to include sexological, social scientific, and popular cultural understandings of bisexual identity (Chapter Three). This discussion makes a contribution to LGBTQ psychology in consolidating the ways in bisexual people have seldom been legitimised, as discussed above. Bisexual identity has rarely been understood as existing in its own right as a distinct, unique, or potentially permanent identity, if indeed it has been included at all. This is the case within mainstream and (to a slightly lesser extent), feminist, LGBTQ and social constructionist research. Because bisexuality has historically been understood as an impossible identity, this has (somewhat ironically) fuelled the marginalisation of bisexual people and their identities.

The implications of this lie in the way that previous literature continues to inform current research, which in turn perpetuates the dismissal of bisexual people. Mainstream, feminist, and LGBTQ research must begin to recognise that bisexual people’s lived experience is not necessarily akin to either lesbians and gay men, or heterosexual people’s experience. A critical message in these findings was that bisexual women are in some ways ‘like lesbians’, in some ways ‘like heterosexual women’ and in some ways different from both groups. This is a clear indication that research which simply ‘includes’ bisexual women in ‘lesbian’ or ‘heterosexual’ categories is not appropriate. Instead, bisexual women must be considered in their own right.

Where do we go from here?: Future research and action

This research has made a number of significant contributions to psychological research. I now discuss issues for future research arising from my thesis.

Health research

Bisexual women felt that they did not fit in to lesbian, gay, or heterosexual space. There are two key implications of this. The first is a clear requirement for research which aims to understand the complexities and wider implications of bisexual women being dismissed and overlooked by those who occupy other non-bisexual identities. This may have implications within the realm of health research, particularly in relation
to wellbeing and mental health. However, mental health is a contentious topic, and it is particularly important that research is conducted sensitively, in order to avoid drawing over simplistic conclusions that may seem to imply that bisexual people are ‘mentally unstable’. If research finds that bisexual people are at greater risk of poor mental health, then a deeper analysis of why this might be would be essential in ensuring that findings are used to support and further understand bisexual people, rather than to condemn and stigmatise them as mentally unwell (see, for example, discussion of the contentious nature of exploring bisexual mental health in Ross, Dobinson & Eady, 2010).

**Sexuality research**

It would be of great benefit to speak with lesbian, gay, and heterosexual people and gather their understandings of bisexuality and bisexual people. Such discussions could be used to help bridge the divide between bisexual people and lesbians and gay men, and bisexual people and heterosexual people, in order to achieve a deeper understanding of how members of all sexual identities can coexist.

As mentioned above, the bisexual women who had no community involvement had different understandings and experiences of their identities. Communities can offer the potential for individuals to feel supported, and have their identities affirmed (e.g., Lehavot, Balsam & Ibrahim-Wells, 2009). However, this may not be the case for bisexual women, and future research would do well to focus specifically on bisexual, lesbian, gay, and queer people who are members of a diverse range of communities in order to unpick the specificities of their experiences of community.

Eadie (1993) has discussed how monogamous people feel that they are ‘failing’ in their bisexuality, while those who are polyamorous feel that they are perpetuating a stereotype of bisexual people as kinky, sex-obsessed, and traitorous (e.g., Spalding & Peplau, 1997; Fairyington, 2008). Non-monogamy and polyamory arose in the women’s discussions, and while a small body of research has emerged which explores polyamory (e.g., Klesse, 2005; 2006; Ritchie & Barker, 2005; 2006; Noël, 2006; Sheff, 2006; Barker & Ritchie, 2007), there is seemingly none which has spoken specifically to monogamous bisexual people about how they experience their identity with specific reference to their relationships, and the implications thereof.
Part Three  

Chapter Ten: A discussion and conclusion of researching bisexual women’s visual identities

My experience, and some literature, has indicated that trans people are likely to be members of bisexual communities (e.g., Barker, Bowes-Catton, Iantaffi, Cassidy & Brewer, 2008). Even less is understood about trans (visual) identities than bisexual (visual) identities, and further research into how trans people understand and manage their (visual) identities, and their understandings of community, would be of great benefit in expanding our understandings of the lived experiences of transgender people and the visual identities of members of marginalised social groups.

I chose to focus on researching women, both in my explorations of bisexual visual identity, and when drawing on other sexual identities in order to contextualise the findings from the interviews. However, the qualitative survey introduced the topic of masculinities, and some young men also took part in the research. The findings in this area indicated that male bisexual men’s appearance was conceived of in different ways from bisexual women’s appearance. Even less research has explored bisexual identity (and visual identity) in relation to men, and researchers would do well to consider this in the future.

Media research and communication

The women were dissatisfied with how bisexuality is portrayed in the media, and disassociated from the images of bisexuality and bisexual women as ‘bicurious’ (e.g., Diamond, 2005b; George, 2009). There are a number of ways in which this could be addressed. First, further research which provides a comprehensive analysis of portrayals of bisexuality in the mainstream mass media would be useful in order to build on the small body of existing literature (e.g., Barker & Langridge, 2008; Capulet, 2010). This could identify exactly how and where these problematic representations happen. Further, discussions with bisexual women to explore what they would like to be portrayed could be generated in order to inform strategies to begin to communicate with the media (e.g., producers and scriptwriters) about how bisexuality is understood by bisexual people. Further, bisexual celebrities could be encouraged to speak out about biphobia, and be out and open about their sexuality (see, for example, Capulet, 2010). This could all aid in cultivating an environment where different versions of bisexuality are allowed to emerge and coexist, in order to influence portrayals of bisexuality in television programmes such as soap operas and dramas.
Conclusion

This research has achieved an in-depth exploration of how bisexual women understand and manage their bodies and their appearance, specifically in relation to their sexual identity. I did so by talking to bisexual women, and through contextualizing bisexual women’s appearance in relation to the appearance of women of other sexual identities. I was able to contribute significant original and confirmatory findings to multidisciplinary appearance research, feminist psychology, and LGBTQ psychology, and beyond.

I have mentioned that the bisexual women who took part in this research were at times ambivalent about their bisexual identity. However, it was clear that at certain times, and in particular ways, they embraced their identities as bisexual. It is important when discussing the findings of research conducted with marginalized social groups that positive and enabling aspects of their identities are explored and reported in order that their stigmatization is not the only story which is disseminated.

This research contributed significantly to a much greater depth of understanding of the identities and visual identities of bisexual women. In turn, the findings also furthered understandings of sexual identity in relation to bodies and appearance more widely. It had made a number of unique contributions to the psychological and social sciences literature, and has identified where future research must focus in order to build on these findings.
BISEXUAL WOMEN’S VISUAL IDENTITIES:
A FEMINIST MIXED-METHODS EXPLORATION

NIKKI JANE HAYFIELD

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Figure 2.3. Image of the character Shane, from the U.S. TV Show, The L Word played by Katherine Moennig. Retrieved September 11th, 2010, from http://blogs.warwick.ac.uk/images/zoupeng/2005/03/14/shane.gif

Figure 2.4. Partners Portia de Rossi (left) and Ellen DeGeneres (right). Retrieved September 13th, 2010, from http://www.topnews.in/files/ellen_degeneres-Portia-de-Rossi.jpg


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Figure 2.15. Cover of the lesbian themed novel Satan Was a Lesbian. http://garyploski.com/files/2006/04/satan-was-a-lesbian-.jpg


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APPENDICES
Part One: Interview Appendices

Appendix 1A: Call for participants placed in The Spark magazine
Issue 52 (Spring, Feb 08 – May 08)
Appendix 1B: Participant information sheet

‘An investigation into bisexual identity, dress and appearance’

Information sheet
This sheet is aimed to provide you with more information about my research and what is involved if you choose to participate.

Who are you and how can I contact you?
My name is Nikki Hayfield and I am a bi woman studying for a PhD at the Centre for Appearance Research in the School of Psychology at the University of the West of England.

Why are you interested in bisexual appearance?
My interest in this topic comes about from being a bisexual woman myself, and from my psychology degree which included modules studying LGB (Lesbian, Gay and Bi) sexualities.

What is it all about?
My aim is to establish whether there is a bisexual ‘look’ or visual identity, therefore I’m interested in finding out more about your appearance as a bisexual woman.

Visual identity can be created via clothing, hair styles, tattoos and piercings, make-up, and other beauty practices, so these are the sorts of things that I’d like to talk about.

I’m also interested to know if bisexual women’s appearance is influenced by relationships and friendships, the length of time they have identified as bisexual or by social involvement with a bisexual/lesbian community.

If there is anything else that you would like to say about bisexuality and how you think appearance is affected by it then I’d be really interested in hearing about that as well.

Has this been studied before?
Bisexuality has received some academic interest, but there is very little consideration of bisexuality and appearance. There have only been a few studies specifically in this area. They suggest that bisexual women do feel differently about their appearance and beauty practices according to the gender of the partner that they are with, or how ‘out’ they are. I am keen to find out more, and to consider what it implies for bisexual women to have a visual identity, in a personal, professional and social context.

I will be going on to do other studies to find out more about these topics. As recruiting bisexual individuals is not always easy, if you know of anyone else who you think might be interested in participating, or are aware of any bisexual ‘communities’ then I’d be really keen to find out more from you. Please indicate on the consent form whether you yourself would be interested in considering being a participant in any of my future research.

What’s involved in participating?
You will be asked to take part in an interview, in order to discuss your thoughts about bisexual women’s appearance. I would very much appreciate you being open, but when discussing these topics you are of course free to say as little or as much as you feel comfortable with.

If you are happy to do so then there is also the option of involving photographs of yourself for us to use as a focus point of the interview. You can either be given a disposable camera and take pictures of yourself (e.g. in your work, home or going out ‘look’) which you, or I, can get developed in preparation for the interview. Alternatively, if you prefer, you can bring along existing photos of yourself, maybe from before and after you came out, or at times when you think you looked particularly bi. If however, you do not wish to include photos, then that’s fine too.
How long will it take and where will it be?
Interviews are expected to last for approximately an hour to two hours of your time. We can do the interviews wherever you feel comfortable, although it will need to be a relatively private and quiet place. I will record our conversation but only I will hear it.

Are there any benefits?
The benefits of participating in this study are that as a participant you will be contributing to psychological research to further our knowledge about what it is like being a bisexual woman. It's also hoped that you will find participating an interesting and rewarding experience.

How will you use the interview?
I will record the interview and our discussion will then be transcribed onto paper. Quotes from our discussions may be used in my PhD thesis and/or any further reports or publications arising from it. However, all identifying information about you will be modified or removed, and you will only ever be referred to by your pseudonym. At the end of the study, the recordings will be destroyed.

What about confidentiality?
To keep your discussion with me completely confidential you will get to choose a pseudonym ~ please write it on this sheet so that you have a record of your chosen name. This will mean that your comments will remain entirely anonymous.

If we have used photos as part of the interview stimuli then please indicate on the consent form which (if any) of these you are willing to be used in my results or presentations.

What if I change my mind about taking part?
Your participation is voluntary so you can decline to answer any question, or you can stop the interview at any time and you do not have to give me a reason for doing so.

You can withdraw from the study or choose not to have your results included, any time between now and September 2009. You do not have to give a reason. If you wish to withdraw, then please contact me with your pseudonym.

Who can I contact about this study?
Please don't hesitate to contact either me, or my supervisors, if after today you have any further questions or queries.

PARTICIPANT PSEUDONYM: ________________________________
Appendices: Part One

Appendix 1C: Photograph study information sheet

‘An investigation into bisexual identity, dress and appearance’

Photographs Information sheet

This sheet provides you with more information about the photo part of my research and what is involved if you choose to participate in this part of the study. Please note that if you are not comfortable to do so, and would rather just do the interview, then that is fine and your participation is still very much appreciated.

What will you do?

I’d like to ask you to use a disposable camera to take some photos before we conduct the interview. It doesn’t matter what you take pictures of, as long as they are related to bisexuality in some way. People have also used existing photos they have which they’ve thought are interesting to include.

- You could take pictures of yourself - maybe you dress differently at work, or when going out, as opposed to at home.
- Do you have a favourite outfit that you are keen for me to see?
- Maybe you are particularly proud of a tattoo or piercing that you feel expresses your bisexuality.
- Maybe you would like to take pictures of others who you think (or know) to be bisexual.
- Perhaps you are involved in bisexual spaces/communities and want to take some photos of them.
- You could take pictures of clothes in shops/markets that appeal to you.
- Maybe you have some photos of before and after coming out and think these ‘say something’ about your sexuality

These are just a few ideas!

Basically, the photos can be of whatever you like – just keep in mind that my study is about how bisexual women look, and so we will be trying to use the photos as a sort of ‘prompt’ to talk about bi appearance. There are no right or wrongs in the pictures that you take; the aim is simply for them to help our discussion. If they don’t, then it really doesn’t matter!

Try and have some fun with this task and please don’t worry about it at all – my aim is for it to be fun, not stressful!

How will they be developed?

I will of course pay for the cameras and the development. Either you, or I, can get the photos developed, whichever is easiest for you. If you choose to get them developed then you can take the camera to any major Boots stores (the ones that offer 1 hour processing). If you’d like me to get them developed then please send the camera back to me. Feel free to use any left over photos for whatever you like, I’m not expecting 27 bisexual photos!

How will you use the photos?

Once the photos are developed, if you are happy to, then we will use some of the time we have together to discuss your thoughts and feelings around the photos that you took in order to aid our discussion.

Afterwards we will discuss whether or not you would be comfortable with some/all of the photos being used in my thesis/presentations/publications arising from it.

Thanks again for taking part 😊
Appendix 1D: Participant consent form

‘An investigation into bisexual identity, dress and appearance’

Consent form

Who am I?
My name is Nikki Hayfield and I am studying for a PhD at the Centre for Appearance Research in the School of Psychology at the University of the West of England.

What is this study about and what do I need to know?
I’m interested in talking to a range of bisexual women to find out whether there is a visible bisexual ‘look’ and how being bisexual impacts on beauty practices. The interview will be recorded and transcribed.

You have an information sheet which contains further information about my study, including contact details, which is yours to keep. Please make sure you read it thoroughly before signing this form and feel free to ask me any questions you have.

Who is involved?
Involved in this study are myself, and my two supervisors.

Please don’t hesitate to contact either me, or them, if you have any further queries.
Would you be interested in receiving a summary of my findings when it is available?  
No thanks ☐  
Yes please ☐ (Please provide address/ email address below)

Would you be interested in the opportunity to participate in my future studies?  
No thanks ☐  
Yes please ☐ (Please provide address/ email address below)

If you are participating in using photos as part of the interviews then please answer:  
I am willing for you to use some/all of my photos in presentations, reports and publications ☐  
I am willing for you to use some/all my photos in only some of the above circumstances ☐  

Please indicate where you are/aren't comfortable you're your photos being used – we will also establish which ones you are happy for me to use:  

I am not willing for you to use my photos after our interview ☐  

If having read the information sheet you are willing to participate in this study then please sign your name on the signature line below. Your signature indicates that you have read and understood the information above and agree to participate in this study.  

Print Name:  

Sign:  

PARTICIPANT PSEUDONYM:
Appendix 1E: Participant demographic questions

An investigation into bisexual identity, dress and appearance

Nikki Hayfield, Centre for Appearance Research, School of Psychology, University of the West of England

Thank you for taking part in my research. In order to have an idea of the range of people that have done so, I would appreciate you answering the following questions. All information will remain confidential.

1. How old are you? ____________________

2. Are you:

A full-time student ☐ A part-time student ☐

In part-time paid employment ☐ Occupation: ____________________

In full-time paid employment ☐ Occupation: ____________________

Other ☐ Please give details: ____________________________________

3. Which of the following qualifications do you have/are you studying towards?

GCSE/O levels ☐ Degree Level ☐

Postgraduate Level ☐ HND/Professional Qualification ☐

Other ☐ Please give details: ____________________

4. How would you identify your race/ethnic background?

________________________________________

5. How would you identify your social class?

________________________________________
6. Do you consider yourself to be disabled?

No □

Yes □ Please give details:

______________________________

7. How would you define your current ‘relationship’ status?

Single □ In a relationship □ (Please fill out section a and b)

a) Who with? With a man □

With a woman □

With more than one partner □ (Please give details)

______________________________

b) What type? Casual □

Co-habiting □

Legally-recognised □ (Please give details)

______________________________

Other □ (Please give details)

______________________________

8. How old were you when you first identified as bisexual? ______

9. What (if any) involvement do you have with the gay, lesbian, or bisexual community?

I go out on the ‘scene’; □

I am involved with a community group □

Other □ (Please give details)
10. How 'out' and open are you about being bisexual?
I am very out ☐
I am mostly out ☐
I am not very out ☐

Please feel free to use this space to discuss your answer more; e.g. are there certain significant people that you are, or are not, out to, or do you have any other comment to make about your outness?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

11. Do you know your weight and height?
No ☐

Yes ☐ Weight: _______________ Height: __________________

12. Do you know your 'dress size'?
No ☐

Yes ☐ Please specify: ____________________________

13. Please list up to 5 words to describe your political, cultural, or religious affiliations:
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

14. Where did you hear about this research?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

PARTICIPANT PSEUDONYM:
..........................................................................................................................
Appendix 1F: Initial interview schedule

Interview Schedule

Research question: Do bisexual women use appearance tools such as clothing, body art and cosmetic/beauty practices in order to create a specifically bisexual visual identity? Is this influenced by relationships and friendships, length of time identified as bisexual or social involvement with a bisexual/lesbian community?

For the sake of rapport establish if they prefer the expression bi/bisexual

1. Clothing/Appearance
So, to begin with, do you think that there is such a thing as a bisexual look?

Further questions/prompts if necessary
- Do you look out for/recognise other women as bi, so basically do you think you have ‘bi-dar’? In what ways do you think bi women are recognisable?
- What about how you look; do you think that’s influenced by your being bi? Do you think you actually try and look bi, and communicate your sexuality to the world? And how would you go about doing that? Why do you think that’s important?
- Are there things that you don’t or won’t wear? Are those because of your sexuality? Do you wear any labels or brands?
- If people had to guess your sexuality from how you look, what answers do you think they’d come up with, or what would they say? Why?
- Do you think it’s important to be recognised as bi? (Who for?) (Why?/why not?)
- Are you aware of clothing that states ‘bisexual’? Would you wear it?
- Do you think it’s easy to read other people’s sexuality? (How would you do that?)
- Do you think bisexual women are likely to borrow from a lesbian look? Is there less of a specific bi look than there is a specific lesbian look?
- I suppose some people would say that the bi look is an androgynous one; would you agree with that? Do you consider looking feminine an important part of how you look?
- It’s been said that reading women’s sexuality is easy; that all you have to do is look at how long their hair is; what do you think?
- What sort of shoes do you wear?
- Are you aware of the bi colours?
- How long have you identified as bi? So did your appearance change when you were coming out?
- Are you out at work? Do you dress differently in work to how you do at home? (In what ways?)
- Why? Do you want to look ‘different’ at work?

2. Community and Scene
Are you involved in any bi communities or involved in the Lesbian and Gay ‘Scene’ at all?

Further questions/prompts if necessary
- In what ways? How would you dress when going out on the scene? (Would it be any different to how you’d dress usually? Are you involved with any online communities? (Do you have a photo posted there and how did you choose the photo that you put there?)

How would your dress change according to where you are going out?

Sue George who is a bisexual author, said quite recently that ‘There is a ‘look’ (on the bi-activist scene): SM/pierced or tattooed/geek/androgynous/bright dyed hair. (The successor, in other words, to the anarchist/punk/hippy look of 80s-90s bisexuals. Now, not all, or even nearly all, politically conscious bis look like that, but that’s ‘the look’). What do you think about that statement?
3. Piercings and Tattoos (Body Art)
Have you got any piercings or tattoos?

Further questions/prompts if necessary
Tattoos: Whereabouts? How did you choose where on your body you had them? What are/is your tattoo(s) like (colours/size/style)? When you had them done were you identifying as bi? Do you feel they tie in with bi-ness now?

Piercings: Where are your piercings? When you had them done were you identifying as bi? Do you feel they tie in with bi-ness now?

What do you think when you see tattoos on other women? And what do you think when you see piercings on other women – would you read anything into that?

4. Make up and beauty practices
Do you wear make up?
Further questions/prompts if necessary
Have you always? How much? Have you ever stopped wearing make up?

5. Can you tell me about plucking and shaving and what you do in terms of that?
Further questions/prompts if necessary
Why do you/don’t you shave/wax etc?
Have your thoughts around hair removal changed since you’ve been identifying as bi? Do they change when you’re with a man compared to when you’re with a woman?
Do you wear perfumes?
How do you choose the deodorants you use?

6. Relationships
If in a relationship (consent form will tell) – Can you tell me a little bit about the relationship that you’re in now?
What about your appearance? Is it affected by your partner, or the relationship that you’re in, do you think?
Further questions/prompts if necessary
Do you think that your body image changes according to the relationship that you’re in?
Does/did your partner comment on your appearance? Do you comment on your partner’s appearance?

7. Bisexuality and Friendship
Can you tell me about the your friends? Do you have a lot of bi friends? Are your friends mostly women or mostly men?

Further questions/prompts if necessary
Do you mention and discuss your sexuality with your friends? Do you go shopping with them?
Do you talk about clothes and appearance with them? Do they influence how you look? How do your friends dress? Do they have distinctive looks themselves?
How do you choose clothes when you go shopping? Which shops would you say you usually prefer to buy from?

(Make sure that hair/jewellery/accessories have been covered?)

8. Do you feel that there are other ways that you express your bisexuality? How?

9. Briefly, in a sentence, how would you define bisexuality

10. Is anything else that I have left out that you think is relevant about bisexuality and appearance? Is there anything else that you’d like to add?
Appendix 1G: Revised interview schedule

Interview Schedule

1. Introductory questions
   - Are you aware of any ideas or stereotypes around what lesbians and gay men look like?
   - Are you aware of any ideas or stereotypes around what bi people look like? (do you think that there is such a thing as a bisexual look?)
   - Do you feel that it's important to express your bisexuality through how you look? Why do you think that it is that there are distinct lesbian and gay looks stereotypes but no bisexual ones?
   - Briefly, in a sentence, what would your definition of bisexuality be?
   - Talk to me a little bit about how you came to identify as bi. Are you out as specifically bi?

2. Clothing/Appearance
   - Did your appearance change when you were coming out?
   - Do you look out for/recognise other women as being bi (do you think you have 'bi-dar'?)
   - Do you think that someone else would be able to tell your sexuality from how you look?
   - Do you think you actually try and look bi, and communicate your sexuality to the world? And how would you go about doing that? Why/why isn't it important to you to communicate your sexuality through how you look?
   - Do you think it's important to be recognised as bi? (Who for?) (Why/why not?)
   - Are there things that you don't or won't wear? Are those because of your sexuality?
   - Describe to me your general 'look', just loosely, like what sorts of clothes you wear most of the time? Are you very casual/smart/girly/make lots of effort?
   - Do you wear any labels or brands?
   - What sort of shoes do you wear (do you wear heels?)
   - Are you aware of clothing that states 'bisexual'? Would you wear it?
   - Do you think that looking feminine is important to you?
   - Is there any truth in this statement: Straight girls have long hair, lesbians have short hair, and bi women have something in-between?
   - Are you aware of the bi colours?
   - Sue George who is a bisexual author, said quite recently that "There is a 'look' (on the bi-activist scene:) SM/pierced or tattooed/geek/androgynous/bright dyed hair. What do you think about that statement?
   - Are you out at work? Do you dress differently in work to how you do at home? How do you feel about adhering to uniforms and dress codes?

3. Piercings and Tattoos (Body Art)
   - Have you got any piercings or tattoos?
   - Tattoos: Whereabouts? How did you choose where on your body you had them? What are / is your tattoo(s) like (colours/size/style)? When you had them done were you identifying as bi? Do you feel they tie in with bi-ness now?
   - Piercings: Where are your piercings? When you had them done were you identifying as bi? Do you feel they tie in with bi-ness now?
   - What do you think when you see tattoos on other women? And what do you think when you see piercings on other women – would you read anything into that? Does it depend on where they are on the body or what style they are?
4. Make up and beauty practices

- Do you wear make up? Have you always? How much? Have you ever stopped wearing make up?
- Can you tell me about plucking and shaving and what you do in terms of that? Why do you/don’t you shave/wax etc? Have your thoughts around hair removal changed since you’ve been identifying as bi? Do they change when you’re with a man compared to when you’re with a woman?
- Do you wear perfumes?
- How do you choose the deodorants you use?

5. Relationships

- Can you tell me a little bit about the relationship that you’re in now? (Is your partner lesbian/bi/straight?)
- Is your appearance affected by your partner, or the relationship that you’re in, do you think?
- Does/did your partner comment on your appearance? Do you comment on your partner’s appearance?

6. Community and Scene

- Are you involved in any bi communities or involved in the Lesbian and Gay ‘Scene’ at all?
- Do you think that bi women are welcome as a part of the scene/an LGB ‘community’?
- What stereotypes are you aware of about bisexual people. Do you think that these are justified?
- How would you dress when going out on the scene/to an LGBT event? (Would it be any different to how you’d dress usually?) Do you think bisexual women are likely to borrow from a lesbian look?
- How would your dress change according to where you are going out? (e.g. a wedding, a night out etc)
- Can you think of reasons why it could be useful to be able to look bisexual/non-heterosexual without actually looking like a (stereotypical) lesbian?
- What do you think about the idea that visibility is a political tool and that if we are not visible we are instead marginalised? I.e. that to be recognised and represented as equal and valid we have to be seen.

7. Bisexuality and Friendship

- Can you tell me about the friends? Do you have a lot of bi friends? Are your friends mostly women or mostly men?
- Do you mention and discuss your sexuality with your friends?
- Do you go shopping with them? Do you talk about clothes and appearance with them? Do they influence how you look?

8. Anything else?

- Is anything else that I have left out that you think is relevant about bisexuality and appearance? Is there anything else that you’d like to add?

Thanks for taking part!
Appendix 1H: Revised interview schedule (second revision)

Interview Schedule 2009

1. Introductory questions
   - It's really useful to get some background to begin with and I'd like to start by asking you to tell me something about how you came to identify or think of yourself as bi/bisexual.
   - Have you always thought of yourself as bi? Have you ever identified/thought of yourself as lesbian/straight/something else?
   - How do you feel about the label/name ‘bisexual/bi’? Love it?! Hate it?! Are there other words you use to describe your sexuality? (e.g., queer, non-heterosexual, sexually fluid…)
   - What is your definition of bisexuality? (Either your experience of bisexuality or bisexuality in general) What do you think of the viewpoint that there is a continuum of human sexuality, with heterosexual and homosexuality at either end and bi in the middle? What do you think about the idea that everyone is a little bit bisexual? Do you feel equally attracted to men and to women? Has this changed over time? Do you feel more or less bisexual when you are with a man/woman?

2. Coming out
   - What does it mean to be out as bisexual? How out are you? Are you out to all family and friends? Are you out at work/university? Are you out as specifically bi? If not, what are you out as? How do you come out as bi? What do you say/do?
   - Do you think it's important to be out as bi? Who for? Has it helped you?
   - How did your people (parents/family/friends/work colleagues) respond when you came out? Were they any particularly negative/positive reactions? How do they react now? Do you think they 'get' your (bi)sexuality? Do you feel that being out as given you the opportunity to help other people understand bisexuality?
   - Do you remember making any changes to your appearance around the time you were coming out? (Lesbians and gay men often talk about changing their appearance when they come out – to express their true self/sexuality.)
   - Do you think that you can come out as bi through your appearance?

3. Community
   - Are you (or have you ever been) involved with a bi community or groups/organisations? What are your experiences of being involved with a bi community? Positive? Negative? Why is it (or was it) important for you to be involved with a bi community/groups? What do you get out of it?
• Have you noticed any common 'look' in the bi groups/communities that you're involved with? If yes, what do you think of that look? Do you think you fit that look yourself?

• When I've been to events like Bicon I've thought quite long and hard about what to wear, is that just me? I do you spend time thinking about how you'll dress in bi space?

• Do you (or have you ever) go out on the (gay) scene? Are you involved with any LGB organisations/groups? How do you find that? Any particularly positive/negative experiences? Do you feel a part of a LGB(T) community? Have you ever experienced biphobia on the scene? Do you ever feel invisible as a bisexual person?

• I think I make sure I 'look the part' before going out on the scene in Bristol, is that the same here, do you think about what you wear? Can you tell me something about why/why not? Can you give me an example of a time when you made sure you 'looked the part'? Has anyone ever commented on your appearance? Positive comments? Negative comments? Have you ever felt out of place? Have you ever felt unwelcome as a bi woman in gay/queer space?

• Are you aware of any bi symbols (such as the bi flag and bi colours), t-shirts, badges? Do you own anything like that? Have you worn it? How did it feel? Did anyone comment? Positive comments? Negative? Have you seen anyone wearing bi t-shirts/badges etc – what did you think?

4. Appearance in general

• I've become absolutely obsessed with spotting lesbians and bisexual people since I started my PhD, even more so than before – is that something you ever do/have ever done? Do you think there is such a thing as gaydar? Bidar? Do you have a good gaydar? Bidar? Do you try and spot other bisexuals? Have you ever shared the 'secret smile' with anyone? Can you spot other bisexuals?

• Are you aware of any stereotypes around what lesbians and gay men look like? Are there any particular styles (hair, clothes, tattoos, piercings etc) that you associate with lesbians/gay men? Is there a typical lesbian look/style (or looks/styles)? Gay look?

• Are you aware of any stereotypes around what bi people look like? Are there any particular styles (hair, clothes, tattoos, piercings etc) that you associate with bisexual women? Do you think that there is such a thing as a bisexual look? (or looks/styles)

• Do you feel that it's important to express your bisexuality through your appearance? Why do you think that it is that there are distinct lesbian and gay looks/stereotypes but no bisexual one? Do you think that if people could look distinctly bisexual that would be useful? Why/why not?
5. Your appearance

- I’m really interested in whether or not people are aware of any stereotypes about bisexuality and appearance. Are you aware of any? Are you aware of any other stereotypes about bisexuality (e.g. not specifically about appearance)

- Since I’ve been studying appearance I have become really aware of how I look. I think about my hair, my clothes, my shoes, everything, in relation to what messages my ‘look’ sends out about me and about my sexuality in particular. Do you think that that’s something that you do?

- Do you think you have a particular look/style? Has that changed/evolved over time? If so, what were the reasons for the changes? Are tattoos/piercings part of your look? Do you think that your look (and the different aspects of your look – hair, clothes, shoes, tattoos, piercings) is related to your bisexuality in any way?

- Do you think it’s possible to be visible as a bisexual woman? (in the same way that it is possible to be visible as a lesbian) Why/why not? How do you do that?

- Do you think other people would read you as bisexual if they saw you on the street? Why/why not? Has that ever happened, that you’ve been read as bi or lesbian? What about in LGB space, do you think it’s possible that you’re read as bi there?

- Can you tell me about the things that you do to manage the appearance of your body and of your face, so I guess I’m thinking about stuff like shaving, plucking, and wearing make-up, How do you feel about those things? Do you do them everyday? (shave, make-up) Do you do more of those types of things now, or less, than you used to. What do you think has influenced whether you do those things?

- Do you use deodorants and perfumes? How do you choose them?

- What types of clothes/shoes do you wear? Do you choose what to wear in a mad rush or spend time over it? Do you wear heels?

- So you knew you were going to be meeting me today, and you knew I was a bisexual woman, were you surprised by how I looked? What surprised you about my appearance? What didn’t surprise you? Do you think I look bi (I won’t be offended if you say yes or no)? Would you read me as bi if you saw me on the street? In LGB space?

6. Relationships

- I notice that you said you’re in a relationship with (whoever), Does your partner comment on your appearance? Do you think your appearance is influenced by your partner? Have you changed how you’ve looked according to the gender of your partner?

7. Anything else?

- Is there anything else that you’d like to add? Anything that you were expecting me to ask that I didn’t?
### Appendix 1I: Demographics of interview participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Years bisexual</th>
<th>In a relationship/ who with/ what type</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Gemma (P1)</td>
<td>29</td>
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<td>Always</td>
<td>Woman/ Cohabiting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Betty (P2)</td>
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<td>White (British)</td>
<td>5 years</td>
<td>Woman/ Cohabiting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emily (P3)</td>
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<td>White (British)</td>
<td>11 years</td>
<td>Man/ Serious but living apart</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Millie (P4)</td>
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<td>White (British)</td>
<td>16 years</td>
<td>Man/ Cohabiting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Berni (P5)</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>White (British)</td>
<td>15 years</td>
<td>Woman/ Casual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah (P6)</td>
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<td>White (British)</td>
<td>7 years</td>
<td>Single</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elizabeth (P7)</td>
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<td>White (British)</td>
<td>4 years</td>
<td>Man/ Cohabiting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roxy (P8)</td>
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<td>White (Caucasian)</td>
<td>Always</td>
<td>Woman/ Civil partnership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>White (Welsh/British)</td>
<td>22 years</td>
<td>Woman/ Civil partnership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandy (P10)</td>
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<td>White (Irish)</td>
<td>1 year</td>
<td>Woman/ Casual</td>
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<td>Man/ Cohabiting</td>
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<td>10 years</td>
<td>Man/ Cohabiting</td>
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<td>Claire (P14)</td>
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<td>Man x2/ Woman Married/ casual/ long term</td>
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<td>Man/ Woman Long-term/ New</td>
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<td>White (European)</td>
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<td>Man/ Married</td>
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### Appendix 1J: Transcription convention

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<th>Underlining of a word</th>
<th>Participant placed emphasis on the word</th>
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<td><em>Italicising of a word</em></td>
<td>Participation elongated the word</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...</td>
<td>Pause in speech of three seconds or less</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>(x second pause)</em></td>
<td>Pause in speech of four seconds or more <em>(x = number of seconds)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>(mm)</em></td>
<td>Indicates interviewer’s ‘verbal nods’ within participants talk (or vice versa).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[...]</td>
<td>Indicates omitted data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>[word in brackets]</em></td>
<td>Participant did not say this word, but it was added to clarify meaning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>[parts of words in parentheses]</em></td>
<td>Participants began a word, but did not finish it *(e.g., if the participant began to say the word ‘hungry’ but did not complete it, then this was annotated as ‘I was so hung(ry), y’know when you’re starving hungry’) but only when I was certain of what they intended to say.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>(laughs/coughs/sniffs)</em></td>
<td>Participant laughs, coughs, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>(laughter)</em></td>
<td>Indicated that both myself and the participant laughed</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Part Two: Appearance and Sexual Identity Questionnaire (ASIQ)

Appendices

Appendix 2A: Flyer handed out at London LGB Pride, August 2008

Appearance
Research
Needs YOU!
Are you a woman and over 18?
Fill in a questionnaire online
about your appearance and
beauty practices and be in with a
chance to win £50!!

For more details and the questionnaire
please visit

http://www.survey.uwe.ac.uk/appearance
Appendix 2B: Text from ‘Welcome Page’ (Information Sheet) of Appearance and Sexual Identity Questionnaire (ASIQ)

A survey of feelings about appearance

Welcome!

A little bit about who I am

My name is Nikki Hayfield and I am a student in the Centre for Appearance Research, which is based in the University of the West of England. I am researching women’s appearance and sexuality.

What is it all about?

Body satisfaction and appearance concerns are important as they are linked with psychological well being and health. Most research however, assumes that women are heterosexual. Little is known about how lesbian and bisexual women feel about their bodies, and how this affects their well being. Women can choose to alter their appearance by changing their beauty practices, make-up, clothing and hair styles but there is little known about how sexuality affects these behaviours. Therefore I am asking women of all sexualities - heterosexual, bisexual, lesbian, queer and any other way women may choose to identify - to participate in this research.

What’s involved in taking part?

All that’s involved in taking part is filling out a questionnaire covering these topics. The questionnaire will take approximately 25-30 minutes to fill in. Please note that for ethical reasons you must be over 18 to take part.

Are there any benefits?

By taking part you are contributing to psychological research to further our knowledge about appearance and sexuality and what part it plays in our lives. At the end of the survey, you also get the chance to be entered into a £50 prize draw!

Where can I get more information?

If you would like more information about the study before taking part then please contact me: Nikki Hayfield: Email: Nikki2.Hayfield@uwe.ac.uk Telephone: +44(0) 117 328 3882

For further information about my supervisors (Professor Nicky Rumsey, Dr Emma Halliwell and Dr Victoria Clarke) and the Centre for Appearance Research, please follow this link:

www.uwe.ac.uk/fas/car
Appendix 2C: Consent / Ethics Page Content of Appearance and Sexual Identity Questionnaire (ASIQ)

Please read the important information below before continuing

I understand that my participation is entirely voluntary so I can decline to answer any question, or I can stop filling out the questionnaire at any time and I do not have to give a reason for doing so. I can withdraw from the study or choose not to have my results included, any time before publication, without being under any obligation to give a reason. I also understand that my data will be destroyed at the end of the study, or immediately should I choose to withdraw from taking part.

Terminology is always tricky! In aiming to be as inclusive as possible I use the term 'Non-Heterosexual' to include Lesbian, Gay, Bi/Bisexual, and Queer identities.

However, questionnaires often use the term 'LGB' (Lesbian Gay Bisexual) which I am not permitted to change.

If either of these terms causes offence, my apologies – the intention is to be entirely inclusive and I am always open to feedback.
Appendix 2D: Appearance and Sexual Identity Questionnaire (ASIQ)

(n.b. this version includes scale/subscale names, which the participants did not see)

Demographics

1. What is your gender?
2. How old are you?
3. How would you describe your race/ethnic background?
4. How would you describe your social class?
5. Do you consider yourself to be disabled?
6. What country do you currently live in?
7. Are you:
   A full time student
   A part-time student
   In paid/self employment
   Other – please specify
8. Which of the following qualifications do you have/are you working towards:
   GCSE/O levels
   A Levels
   HND / Professional Qualification
   Degree Levels
   Postgraduate Level
   Other – please specify
9. How would you describe where you live:
   Rural – village/hamlet
   Rural – town
   Urban – town
   Urban – city
10. How would you define your current romantic / sexual relationship status?
    Single
    In a relationship
11. Who is your relationship with?
   With a man
   With a woman
   Other – please give details below
   If other or ‘with more than one partner’ please give details

12. What type of relationship is it?
   Casual
   Long-term
   Cohabiting
   Legally recognised – (please specify below e.g. married / civil partnered)

13. Do you have any children?
   No
   Yes – please specify:
     How many?

14. Approximately what is your weight?

15. Approximately what is your height?

16. Approximately what is your ‘dress size’?

17. How would you define your sexuality?
   Bi / Bisexual
   Lesbian
   No-heterosexual
   Heterosexual

18. Approximately at what age did you start identifying with a non-heterosexual identity?

19. Approximately how old were you when you first came out to someone (if you have)

20. How out and open are you about your sexuality?
    I am very out
    I am mostly out
    I am not very out
Questions about feminism:

Single Item Question

Scale: 1. Not at all 2. 3. 4. 5. 6. 7. Very much so indeed

21. To what extent do you consider yourself a feminist?

Feminism and the Women’s Movement Scale (Fassinger, 1994)


22. Feminist leaders may be extreme, but they have the right idea

23. There are better ways for women to fight for equality than through feminism (reversed)

24. Most people would favour feminism if they knew more about it

25. Feminism has positively influenced relationships between men and women

26. Feminists are too radical and extreme in their views (reversed)

27. Feminists have made important gains in equal rights and political power for women

28. Feminists are too visionary for a practical world (reversed)

29. Feminist principles should be adopted everywhere

30. Feminists are a menace to this nation and the world (reversed)

31. I am overjoyed that women’s liberation is finally happening in this country

Questions about your appearance

Body-Esteem Scale for adolescents and adults (BES) (Mendelson, Mendelson and White, 2001)

Next are going to be some statements about appearance and attractiveness. Please indicate how often you agree with the following statements using the scale provided


32. I like what I look like in pictures (appearance subscale)

33. Other people consider me good looking (attribution subscale)

34. I’m proud of my body (weight satisfaction subscale)

35. I am preoccupied with trying to change my body weight (reversed) (weight satisfaction subscale)

36. I think my appearance would help me get a job (attribution subscale)

37. I like what I see when I look in the mirror (appearance subscale)
38. There are lots of things I’d change about my looks if I could (reversed) (appearance subscale)

39. I am satisfied with my weight (weight satisfaction subscale)

40. I wish I looked better (reversed) (appearance subscale)

41. I really like what I weigh (weight satisfaction subscale)

42. I wish I looked someone else (reversed) (appearance subscale)

43. People my own age like my looks (attribution subscale)

44. My looks upset me (reversed) (appearance subscale)

45. I’m as nice looking as most people (attribution subscale)

46. I’m pretty happy about the way I look (appearance subscale)

47. I feel I weigh the right amount for my height (weight satisfaction subscale)

48. I feel ashamed of how I look (reversed) (appearance subscale)

49. Weighing myself depresses me (reversed) (weight satisfaction subscale)

50. My weight makes me unhappy (reversed) (weight satisfaction subscale)

51. My looks help me get dates (attribution subscale)

52. I worry about the way I look (reversed) (appearance subscale)

53. I think I have a good body (weight satisfaction subscale)

54. I’m looking as nice as I’d like to (appearance subscale)

Questions about your body hair

Women and Body Hair Scale (Basow and Braman, 1998)

Next are listed a number of statements concerning women’s body hair. Please read each item carefully and indicate how you feel about the item using the following scale.


55. Body hair on women is ugly

56. Body hair makes women look like men

57. Women shouldn’t have to remove leg and underarm hair (reversed)

58. Body hair on women is disgusting

59. Body hair is physically uncomfortable

60. Women who don’t remove their body hair should receive social disapproval

61. Women’s bodies are fine unshaven (reversed)
62. Body hair is unfeminine

63. Women need to remove body hair in order to appeal to a partner

64. Removing body hair makes women’s skin feel soft and silky

65. Body hair makes a woman look like an animal

66. Removing body hair signals that a woman is “grown-up”

67. Body hair on women is unattractive

**Body Hair Alteration Scale (BHAS)**


68. Do you remove (i.e. pluck, shave, wax etc) and/or alter (i.e. remove some of, bleach, etc) your armpit hair?

69. Do you remove (i.e. pluck, shave, wax etc) and/or alter (i.e. remove some of, bleach, etc) the hair on your legs?

70. Do you remove (i.e. pluck, shave, wax etc) and/or alter (i.e. remove some of, bleach, etc) your eyebrows?

71. Do you remove (i.e. pluck, shave, wax etc) and/or alter (i.e. remove some of, bleach, etc) other facial hair

72. Do you remove (i.e. pluck, shave, wax etc) and/or alter (i.e. remove some of, bleach, etc) your bikini line?

**Questions about make-up**

Next are listed a number of statements concerning make-up. Please read each item carefully and indicate how you feel about the item

**Beliefs about Make-up Scale (BAMUS)**

*Scale: 1. Never 2. 3. 4. 5. 6. 7. Always*

73. How often do you wear make-up?

*Scale 1. Disagree strongly 2. 3. 4. 5. 6. 7. Agree Strongly*

74. Women look fine without make-up (reversed)

75. Make-up on women is attractive
Questions about femininity

Engagement with Feminine Appearance Scale (EFAS)

Next are listed a number of statements concerning femininity. Please read each item carefully and indicate how you feel about the item.

Scale: 1. Never 2. 3. 4. 5. 6. 7. Always

76. I like to wear feminine clothing
77. I prefer my hair when it is longer
78. People would often describe me as being girly in how I look
79. I would be very surprised if I were to be mistaken for a man
80. I would never wear a skirt or dress (reversed)
81. It is important to me to look feminine

Questions about recognition

Recognition of Sexual Identity through Appearance Scale (RSIAS)

Scale: 1. Disagree Strongly 2. 3. 4. 5. 6. 7. Agree Strongly

82. It is important to me that others are able to tell my sexuality from the way I look
83. I can signal my sexual identity to others by wearing certain clothes
84. I'd be offended if someone thought I was LGB based on my appearance
85. My appearance is useful in signalling my sexuality to others
86. I don't think that people can tell my sexuality from my appearance (reversed)
Appendix 2E: Text from ‘Thank You Page’ of Appearance and Sexual Identity Questionnaire (ASIQ)

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey.

It is important that you make a note of your unique participant reference number which you can now see at the top of the page. If you chose to enter the £50 Prize Draw I will be sure to contact you if you are a winner!

I hope taking part has not led to you feeling distressed, but if you wish to talk about some of the issues you have just been asked about, you may be interested in the following services:

*London Gay and Lesbian Switchboard* provides an information, support and referral service for lesbians, gay men, bisexual people and anyone with questions around their sexuality.

Their helpline number is 020 7837 7324 (daily 10am -11pm) [http://www.lggs.org.uk/](http://www.lggs.org.uk/)

*Supportline* offer confidential emotional support on any issue by telephone, email and post. They also keep details of counsellors, agencies and support groups throughout the UK.

Their Helpline number is 020 8554 9004, email them on [info@supportline.org.uk](mailto:info@supportline.org.uk) or visit their website at [http://www.supportline.org.uk](http://www.supportline.org.uk)

**Many Thanks For Taking Part!**
Appendices: Part Two

Appendix 2F: Output from tests of normality for Body Mass Index (BMI)

Descriptive statistics and Kolmogorov-Smirnov results for BMI

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Descriptives</th>
<th>Statistic</th>
<th>Std. Error</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BMI Mean</td>
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<td>.25208</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>95% Confidence Interval for Mean</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower Bound</td>
<td>24.5165</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper Bound</td>
<td>25.5071</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5% Trimmed Mean</td>
<td>24.5004</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median</td>
<td>23.5418</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variance</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Std. Deviation</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimum</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Maximum</td>
<td>54.69</td>
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<td>Range</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interquartile Range</td>
<td>5.21</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skewness</td>
<td>1.726</td>
<td>.112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kurtosis</td>
<td>4.032</td>
<td>.224</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tests of Normality

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Kolmogorov-Smirnov</th>
<th>Shapiro-Wilk</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Statistic</td>
<td>df</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BMI</td>
<td>.151</td>
<td>473</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction
Histogram for BMI statistics:

Appendices: Part Two

---

Histogram

- Normal

---

Histogram

Frequency

0 20 40 60 80 100

BMI

Mean = 25.01
Std. Dev. = 6.482
N = 473

421
Appendix 2G: Means and trimmed means

Key:

This key shows the working titles (used during analysis) displayed in the output and the corresponding name used in the Chapter:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Working title</th>
<th>Final title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self developed Body Hair Scale (SDBH)</td>
<td>Body Hair Alteration Scale (BHAS)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self Developed Femininity Scale (SDFem)</td>
<td>Engagement with Feminine Appearance Scale (EFAS)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self Developed Recognition Scale (SDR)</td>
<td>Recognition of Sexual Identity through Appearance Scale (RSIAS)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Trimmed means

The first test of normality was to examine the ‘5% trimmed means’ of each of the subscales, and for each of the sexuality groups. This value is generated by removing the highest and lowest 5% of cases and calculating a new mean. If there were large differences between the ‘mean’ and the ‘trimmed mean’, this would suggest that there were extreme scores within the data, which were impacting upon the mean scores (Pallant, 2002). In this data set the means and trimmed means were close in value (Appendix 7e), suggesting no extremities.

Means and trimmed means for Feminism and the Women’s Movement Scale (FWM)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feminism and the Women’s Movement (FWM)</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>5% Trimmed Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All data</td>
<td>453</td>
<td>3.56</td>
<td>4.74</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bisexual</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>3.68</td>
<td>3.72</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lesbian</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>3.66</td>
<td>3.68</td>
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<tr>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
<td>258</td>
<td>3.48</td>
<td>3.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-heterosexual</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>3.67</td>
<td>3.66</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Means and trimmed means for Feminist Single Item

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feminist Single Item</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>5% Trimmed Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All data</td>
<td>485</td>
<td>4.65</td>
<td>4.73</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bisexual</td>
<td>84</td>
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<td>5.12</td>
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<td>Lesbian</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>5.11</td>
<td>5.23</td>
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<tr>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
<td>262</td>
<td>4.30</td>
<td>4.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-heterosexual</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>5.10</td>
<td>5.21</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Means and trimmed means for each subscale of the Body Esteem Scale (BES)

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<th>5% Trimmed Mean</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
<td>All data</td>
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<td>3.28</td>
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<tr>
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<td>3.14</td>
<td>3.14</td>
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<td>116</td>
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<td>3.39</td>
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<td>265</td>
<td>3.25</td>
<td>3.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-heterosexual</td>
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<td>3.35</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BES - Attribution</th>
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<th>Mean</th>
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</tr>
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<td>3.12</td>
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<tr>
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<td>3.18</td>
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<td>3.12</td>
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<tr>
<td>Non-heterosexual</td>
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<td>2.97</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
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<th>BES - Weight</th>
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<td>2.97</td>
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<td>2.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesbian</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>3.10</td>
<td>3.11</td>
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<tr>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
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<td>2.96</td>
<td>2.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-heterosexual</td>
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<td>2.95</td>
<td>2.97</td>
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### Means and trimmed means for Women and Body Hair Scale (WBHS) and Body Hair Alteration Scale (BHAS)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Women and Body Hair Scale (WBHS)</th>
<th>N</th>
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<tr>
<td>All data</td>
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<td>Lesbian</td>
<td>115</td>
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<td>3.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
<td>261</td>
<td>3.20</td>
<td>3.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-heterosexual</td>
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<td>3.77</td>
<td>3.78</td>
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<table>
<thead>
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<th>Body Hair Alteration Scale (BHAS)</th>
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<th>Mean</th>
<th>5% Trimmed Mean</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
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<tr>
<td>Lesbian</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>2.88</td>
<td>2.88</td>
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<tr>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
<td>256</td>
<td>2.34</td>
<td>2.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-heterosexual</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>3.26</td>
<td>3.27</td>
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### Means and trimmed means for the Engagement with Feminine Appearance Scale (EFAS)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Engagement with Feminine Appearance Scale (EFAS)</th>
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<th>Mean</th>
<th>5% Trimmed Mean</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>4.30</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bisexual</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>4.22</td>
<td>4.26</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lesbian</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>3.49</td>
<td>3.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
<td>253</td>
<td>4.64</td>
<td>4.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-heterosexual</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>3.67</td>
<td>3.68</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Means and trimmed means for Recognition of Sexual Identity through Appearance Scale (RSIAS)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recognition of Sexual Identity through Appearance Scale (RSIAS)</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>5% Trimmed Mean</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>All data</td>
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<td>3.43</td>
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<td>80</td>
<td>3.18</td>
<td>3.17</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lesbian</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>3.96</td>
<td>3.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
<td>256</td>
<td>3.31</td>
<td>3.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-heterosexual</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>3.24</td>
<td>3.26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 2H: Descriptive statistics and results of tests of normality

Skewness, kurtosis and normal distribution

Preliminary analysis was conducted through the descriptive figures to assess the normal distribution of the data set. Variance and range scores show the distribution of the data, and indicate how well the mean represents the data. The figures for skew (lack of symmetry) or kurtosis (extends higher, or sits very low within a bell curve) (Field, 2005) indicate the ‘shape’ of the data set. A value of 0 would indicate perfect symmetry. Histograms were also used in order to visually examine this data. Standard deviations are the square-root of the variance, and show how much scores vary across participants, hence they also indicate the shape of the data. If standard deviation figures are low, then this indicates that most of the scores are close to the mean, and that therefore the mean represents the data well (Field, 2005).

Kolmogorov-Smirnov tests were also used to establish whether this data was normally distributed. The test does this by comparing the scores in the data it is testing to a perfectly normally distributed set of scores (Field, 2005). All but one of the results of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test (Appendix 7f) were significant (p<.05) which indicates that the normality of the data is being violated. However, for sample sizes above two-hundred, this test has been deemed too sensitive (Pallant, 2002, Field, 2005). Therefore, for larger samples histograms are a more appropriate tool in order to provide a pictorial image of the symmetry of the data and make an informed decision about the normality of the data (Field, 2005). The descriptives and Kolmogorov-Smirnov tests are shown below, and histograms can be seen in the next section.

Descriptive statistics and Kolmogorov-Smirnov results for the Feminism and the Women’s Movement Scale (FWM) and Single Feminist Item

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Descriptives</th>
<th>Statistic</th>
<th>Std. Error</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Feminist and the Wom</td>
<td>3.5621</td>
<td>.02274</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movement Scale (FWM)</td>
<td>3.5175</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>95% Confidence Int.</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower Bound</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper Bound</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5% Trimmed Mean</td>
<td>3.5718</td>
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<td>Median</td>
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<td>Std. Deviation</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Minimum</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Range</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interquartile Range</td>
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<tr>
<td>Skewness</td>
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<td>.115</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kurtosis</td>
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<td>.229</td>
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</table>
### Tests of Normality

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kolmogorov-Smirnov</th>
<th>Shapiro-Wilk</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feminist and the Women's Movement Scale (FWM)</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*a. Lilliefors Significance Correction*

### Descriptives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statistic</th>
<th>Std. Error</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Feminist Single Item Mean</td>
<td>4.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>95% Confidence Interval for Mean Lower Bound</td>
<td>4.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean Upper Bound</td>
<td>4.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5% Trimmed Mean</td>
<td>4.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median</td>
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<tr>
<td>Variance</td>
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<td>Maximum</td>
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<td>Range</td>
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<td>Kurtosis</td>
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### Tests of Normality

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<tr>
<th>Kolmogorov-Smirnov</th>
<th>Shapiro-Wilk</th>
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<tbody>
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*a. Lilliefors Significance Correction*
### Descriptive statistics and Kolmogorov-Smirnov results for the Body Esteem Scale (BES)

#### Descriptives

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<tr>
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* a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

### Descriptive statistics and Kolmogorov-Smirnov results for the Women and Body Hair Scale (WBHS) and Body Hair Alteration Scale (BHAS)

### Descriptives

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*a. Lilliefors Significance Correction*

### Descriptive statistics and Kolmogorov-Smirnov results for Engagement with Feminine Appearance Scale (EFAS)

#### Descriptives

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#### Tests of Normality

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*a. Lilliefors Significance Correction*
Descriptive statistics and Kolmogorov-Smirnov results for the Recognition of Sexual Identity through Appearance Scale (RSIAS) and Lesbian and Bisexual Fitting In Scale (LBFIS)

<table>
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**Tests of Normality**

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<td>df</td>
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<tr>
<td>.042</td>
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Appendix 2I: Histograms

Histograms with normal distribution curves were generated for each of the scales and subscales. Although some of the histograms indicated some skew or kurtosis this was considered acceptable. This is firstly because the sample size is large enough to tolerate this (Pallant, 2002), and secondly (particularly with the skew of the data), the pattern of scores may reflect the underlying nature of the construct being measured, rather than indicate problematic data (Field, 2005). Furthermore the scores fitted well overall in relation to the normal distribution curves, indicating that the data is normally distributed (Pallant, 2002).

Histograms for the Feminism and the Women's Movement Scale (FWM) and Single Feminist Item

![Histogram Graph](image-url)
Histograms for each scale of the Body Esteem Scale

Appendices: Part Two

Histogram

---

Histogram

---

Mean = 4.55
Std. Dev. = 1.794
N = 488

Mean = 3.29
Std. Dev. = 0.762
N = 488
Appendices: Part Two

Histograms for the Women and Body Hair Scale (WBHS) and Body Hair Alteration Scale (BHAS)

Histogram

Women and Body Hair Scale (WBHS)

--- Normal

Mean = 3.41
Std. Dev. = 0.33
N = 485

Histogram

Self Developed Body Hair Questions (SDBH)

--- Normal

Mean = 2.58
Std. Dev. = 0.59
N = 471

434
Appendices: Part Two

Histogram for the Engagement with Feminine Appearance Scale (EFAS)

Histogram

Histogram

Histograms for Recognition of Sexual Identity through Appearance Scale (RSIAS)

Histogram

Histogram
Appendix 2J: Normal Probability Plots

Normal probability plots show scores plotted against an expected value (Pallant, 2002). The reasonably straight lines support the histograms in indicating that the data is normally distributed.

Normal probability plots for the Feminism and the Women’s Movement Scale (FWM) and Single Feminist Item

![Normal Q-Q Plot of FWM](image)

![Normal Q-Q Plot of Feminist Single Item](image)
Normal probability plots for each scale of the Body Esteem Scale

Appendices: Part Two
Normal probability plots for the Women and Body Hair Scale (WBHS) and Body Hair Alteration Scale (BHAS)
Normal probability plot for the Engagement with Feminine Appearance Scale (EFAS)
Normal probability plots for the Recognition of Sexual Identity through Appearance Scale (RSIAS)

Normal Q-Q Plot of Self Developed Recognition Scale (SDR)
Appendix 2K: Detrended Normal Q-Q Probability Plots

Another visual image of normal distribution can be seen in the detrended normal Q-Q plots. These show the deviation of scores from a straight line. Because there are no clusters of scores, and because most lay close to the zero line, (Pallant, 2002) these once again indicate that the data is normally distributed and appropriate for parametric tests.

Detrended normal Q-Q plots for the Feminism and the Women’s Movement Scale (FWM) and Single Feminist Item

Detrended Normal Q-Q Plot of the Feminism and Women's Movement Scale (FWM)

Detrended Normal Q-Q Plot of Feminist Single Item
Detrended normal Q-Q plots for each scale of the Body Esteem Scale
Detrended normal Q-Q plots for the Women and Body Hair Scale (WBHS) and Body Hair Alteration Scale (BHAS)
Detrended Normal Q-Q plots for the Recognition of Sexual Identity through Appearance Scale (RSIAS)
Appendix 2L: Boxplots

A final visual representation of the data can be seen in the boxplots. These are useful to show smallest and largest values (through the whiskers), medians (the centre line) and any outliers (Pallant, 2002). They also give an excellent pre-analysis indication of differences between the means for each of the groups. Some of the boxplots indicate that there are outliers in the data, which can indicate 'strange' patterns of scores (Pallant, 2002). For this reason, further a Mahalanobis test was conducted, the results of which are show in the next section.

Boxplot for the Feminism and the Women's Movement Scale (FWM) and Single Feminist Item

![Boxplot](image-url)
Boxplots for each scale of the Body Esteem Scale
Appendices: Part Two

Boxplots for the Women and Body Hair Scale (WBHS) and Body Hair Alteration Scale (HAS)

[Graph showing boxplots for different sexuality categories]

[Graph showing boxplots for different sexuality categories]
Appendices: Part Two

Boxplot for the Engagement with Feminine Appearance Scale (EFAS)

Boxplots for the Recognition of Sexual Identity through Appearance Scale (RSIAS)
Appendix 2M: Mahalanobis distant test of outliers

In order to examine the outliers more closely the data were analysed for significant differences using a multivariate test of normality. The test chosen was the Mahalanobis distance which picks up any outliers that may have strange patterns of scores. It is considered a strong test and appropriate for multivariate analysis (Pallant, 2002).

Table 1: Results of the Mahalanobis distance test:

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<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Dev.</th>
<th>N</th>
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<tr>
<td>Mahal distance</td>
<td>0.021</td>
<td>44.126</td>
<td>1.996</td>
<td>3.661</td>
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To establish whether the Mahalanobis maximum value (44.13) is acceptable it needs to be compared against a chi-square critical value. In order to do this, the number of dependent variables are used in place of the degrees of freedom (df) value to a significance (alpha) level of <0.001 (Pallant, 2002). With twenty-one dependent variables the critical value is 46.80 (Greene and D’Oliveira, 2001). Because the Mahalanobis maximum value is smaller than the chi-square critical value this indicates that there are no multivariate outliers in this data set. While the two values are close, ANOVA is able to tolerate small numbers of outliers and the data set is large enough for these results to be considered normally distributed (Pallant, 2002).
Appendix 2N: Post-hoc Bonferroni tests

1st Hoc Bonferroni Test for Feminism and the Women’s Movement Scale (FWM) and Single Feminist Item combined

Multiple Comparisons

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<td>Mean Difference (I-J)</td>
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<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>homosexual lesbian</td>
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<tr>
<td>heterosexual</td>
<td>.3353*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>heterosexual lesbian</td>
<td>-.2927*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>homosexual</td>
<td>.3353*</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Based on observed means.

* The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.

1st Hoc Bonferroni Test for Body Esteem Scale (BES)

Multiple Comparisons

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<th>Bonferroni</th>
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Multiple Comparisons

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Based on observed means.
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454
### Post Hoc Bonferroni Test for items on each make-up item

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### Post Hoc Bonferroni Test for Engagement with Feminine Appearance Scale (EFAS) and Recognition of Sexual Identity through Appearance (RSIAS) Scales

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Part Three: Qualitative Survey Appendices

Appendix 3A: Questions asked for feedback on pilot version of the qualitative survey

1. What was it like doing the survey?
2. How long did it take you?
3. How was the information part – do you feel you know enough about my study without being bored?
4. Were there questions that you found hard?
5. There are two ways that the question is phrased:

   If someone asked you to describe what a blank typically looks like, what would you say?

   Or

   In what ways would you recognise that someone was a blank from their appearance?

   Which do you prefer?

6. There are three versions of the questionnaire:
   a booklet version
   a spaced out non booklet version
   a paper saving option

   Which works best for you?

7. Any other comments on the survey?
Appendix 3B: Final paper version of qualitative survey based on feedback from Pilot Study:

Appearance and Sexuality Survey

My name is Nikki Hayfield. I am a PhD student in the Centre for Appearance Research in the Department of Psychology at UWE. I am conducting a research project on appearance and sexuality.

I am inviting people to complete a brief qualitative survey on 'cultural understandings of how people's sexuality is reflected in or communicated through their dress and appearance'.

I'd really appreciate you answering the following questions as honestly as you can. There are no right or wrong answers! Please don't be worried about being 'politically correct'. Just write what first comes to your mind, even if you think that what has come into your head is 'stereotypical'. I am collecting this information simply to find out more about your impressions of people's appearance.

The survey is completely anonymous and confidential. Completion of this survey is voluntary. You can withdraw from this research at any time – please take a note of the unique participant code number and contact me (Nikki2.Hayfield@uwe.ac.uk) with this number if you decide that you would prefer to withdraw from the study. (You can do this by tearing off this front sheet and keeping it.)

By filling out this survey you are providing your consent to take part in the research.

Participant code: ___________________________________________________________________
Course Code: ___________________________________________________________________

Please return this survey to Nikki either by handing it back to her, or via the box with 'PhD Appearance Study' written on it outside 2L13 in the Centre for Appearance Research area.
Section 1: Questions about Appearance

Sexuality

1. If someone asked you to describe what a lesbian looks like, would you say? (E.g. in what ways could you potentially tell her from their appearance?)

2. If someone asked you to describe what a gay man would you say? (E.g. in what ways could you potentially tell him from their appearance?)

3. If someone asked you to describe what a bisexual woman typically looks like, what would you say? (E.g. in what ways could you potentially recognise a bisexual woman from their appearance?)
4. If someone asked you to describe what a **bisexual man** typically looks like, what would you say? (E.g. in what ways could you potentially recognise a bisexual man from their appearance?)

5. If someone asked you to describe what a **heterosexual woman** typically looks like, what would you say? (E.g. in what ways could you potentially recognise a heterosexual woman from their appearance?)

6. If someone asked you to describe what a **heterosexual man** typically looks like, what would you say? (E.g. in what ways could you potentially recognise a heterosexual man from their appearance?)

7. Is there anything else you’d like to add about **appearance and sexuality**?
Section 2: Questions about You

To help me understand who has taken part in this research it's really useful to know the following information. All the details that you provide will remain anonymous and confidential.

1. How old are you? ________________  2. What is your gender? ________________

3. How would you identify your race/ethnic background? ____________________________________________

4. How would you identify your social class?

Working Class ☐  Middle Class ☐  Upper Class ☐  Other ☐ (If 'other' please give details below)

________________________________________

________________________________________

5. Do you consider yourself to be disabled?

No ☐  Yes ☐

If yes please give details:

________________________________________

________________________________________

6. Which of the following most closely describes your sexuality?

Bisexual ☐  Lesbian ☐  Gay ☐  Heterosexual ☐

Are there are other ways that you would describe your sexuality?

________________________________________

________________________________________

Please turn over …
1. Do you consent to take part in this research?
   - [ ] Yes
   - [ ] No
Appearance and Sexuality Survey

Unique Participant Code

1. Please create a participant code for yourself, and then make note of it.

The reason that you are being asked to create your own code is that Survey Monkey cannot generate participant codes.

Your participant code needs to be a unique way in which your data can be identified, just in case you do decide to withdraw from the research at a later date.

You could use your favourite food, your first pet's name, or anything else that would allow me to identify your answers in order to destroy them if you choose to withdraw.
# Appearance and Sexuality Survey

## Questions About Appearance and Sexuality

The survey part of this research consists only of the following seven questions. All I will be asking other than these seven questions are demographic questions.

I’d really appreciate you answering these questions as honestly as you can. There are no right or wrong answers! Please don’t be worried about being ‘politically correct’, just write what first comes into your mind, even if you think that your thought is based only on a ‘stereotypical’ idea. If what you think of is ‘a stereotype’, then please tell me more about that ‘stereotype’. I am also interested in whether you are aware of any other ways in which sexuality might be expressed through, or read from, appearance.

1. **If someone asked you to describe what a lesbian typically looks like, what would you say?** (E.g. in what ways could you potentially recognise a lesbian from their appearance?)

2. **If someone asked you to describe what a gay man typically looks like, what would you say?** (E.g. in what ways could you potentially recognise a gay man from their appearance?)

3. **If someone asked you to describe what a bisexual woman typically looks like, what would you say?** (E.g. in what ways could you potentially recognise a bisexual woman from their appearance?)

4. **If someone asked you to describe what a bisexual man typically looks like, what would you say?** (E.g. in what ways could you potentially recognise a bisexual man from their appearance?)

5. **If someone asked you to describe what a heterosexual woman typically looks like, what would you say?** (E.g. in what ways could you potentially recognise a heterosexual woman from their appearance?)
Appearance and Sexuality Survey

6. If someone asked you to describe what a heterosexual man typically looks like, what would you say? (e.g., in what ways could you potentially recognize a heterosexual man from their appearance?)

7. Is there anything else you'd like to add about appearance and sexuality?
### Appearance and Sexuality Survey

#### Questions About You

1. What course are you currently studying? (e.g., 'Psychology Degree' or 'Health Psychology Masters', etc.):

2. Are you a full time or part time student?
   - [ ] Full Time
   - [ ] Part Time

3. What year of study are you in?
   - [ ] First Year
   - [ ] Second Year
   - [ ] Third Year
   - [ ] Fourth Year
   - [ ] Other
   
   If you have answered 'other' please give details below:

4. How old are you?

5. What is your gender?

6. How would you identify your race and ethnic background?
Appearance and Sexuality Survey

7. How would you identify your social class?
   - [ ] Working Class
   - [x] Middle Class
   - [ ] Upper Class
   - [ ] Other

   If you have answered 'other' please give details below:

8. Do you consider yourself to be disabled?
   - [ ] No
   - [x] Yes

   If you have answered 'yes' please give details below:

9. Which of the following most closely describes your sexuality?
   - [ ] Bisexual
   - [ ] Lesbian
   - [ ] Gay
   - [ ] Heterosexual

   If there are other ways that you would describe your sexuality please give details below:

10. Please use this space to tell me if there is anything that would have made this survey easier for you to answer:
Section 1: Questions about Appearance and Sexuality

1. If someone asked you to describe what a lesbian typically looks like, what would you say? (E.g. in what ways could you potentially recognise a lesbian from their appearance?)

2. If someone asked you to describe what a gay man typically looks like, what would you say? (E.g. in what ways could you potentially recognise a gay man from their appearance?)

3. If someone asked you to describe what a bisexual woman typically looks like, what would you say? (E.g. in what ways could you potentially recognise a bisexual woman from their appearance?)
4. If someone asked you to describe what a bisexual man typically looks like, what would you say? (E.g., in what ways could you potentially recognise a bisexual man from their appearance?)

5. If someone asked you to describe what a heterosexual woman typically looks like, what would you say? (E.g., in what ways could you potentially recognise a heterosexual woman from their appearance?)

6. If someone asked you to describe what a heterosexual man typically looks like, what would you say? (E.g., in what ways could you potentially recognise a heterosexual man from their appearance?)
Section 2: Questions about You

To help me understand who has taken part in this research it’s really useful to know the following information. All the details that you provide will remain anonymous and confidential.

1. How old are you? ____________ 2. What is your gender? ____________

3. What course are you currently on?

4. How would you identify your race/ethnic background?

5. How would you identify your social class?

   Working Class □   Middle Class □   Upper Class □   Other □ (If ‘other’
please give details below)

6. Do you consider yourself to be disabled?

   No □   Yes □

   If yes please give details:

7. Which of the following most closely describes your sexuality?

   Bisexual □   Lesbian □   Gay □   Heterosexual □

   Are there are other ways that you would describe your sexuality?

Please turn over …
### Appendix 3G: Demographics of survey participants

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