

South African bisexual women's accounts of their gendered and sexualised identities:

A feminist poststructuralist analysis

by

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Dedication

For Brigid Niamh Lynch

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Abstract

This feminist poststructuralist study explores discourses of gendered and sexualised subjectivity of South African women who self-identify as bisexual. The discipline of psychology has typically upheld a monosexual binary, where heterosexuality and homosexuality are positioned as the only legitimate categories of sexual identification. Within such a structure bisexuality is not considered a viable sexual identity. In broader public discourses female bisexuality is generally constructed in delegitimising ways, such as through constructions that necessarily equate bisexuality with promiscuity or describe it as an eroticised male fantasy, as a threat to lesbian politics, or as a strategy to retain heterosexual privilege.

Data collection entailed conducting individual interviews with thirteen bisexual women and the transcribed texts were analysed using discourse analysis. The analysis focused on how bisexuality is constructed in the interview texts, how the various constructions of bisexuality function and how gendered subjectivity intersects with participants' identity as bisexual.

The analysis identifies a number of discourses that impact on, in varied and contradictory ways, participants' positioning as bisexual. In a post-apartheid context, participants regard fixing their identity along strictly defined lines of difference as oppressive and resist bisexuality as being primary to their identity. Participants challenge the traditional gender binary through unsettling the automatic linking of sex, gender and sexuality in discourses of sexual desire. However, participants also demonstrate the coercive effects of dominant discourse in the gendered positioning of subjects, with heterosexuality in particular functioning as a normative sexual category with implications for participants' gendered subjectivity. It then appears that parallel to its ability to disrupt the gender binary, bisexual discourse also acts in ways to support it.

The analysis further indicates that in claiming a bisexual identity, participants risk marginalisation in the face of delegitimising discourses that construct them in negative terms of promiscuity, hypersexuality and sexual decadence. Powerful silencing discourses further construct same-sex attraction as un-African and as sinful. The analysis concludes with a discussion of participants' strategies to normalise bisexuality.

This study contributes to research accounts that explore diversity in sexual identification and creates greater visibility of bisexual women in South African discourses of sexuality. It also contributes to

theories of female sexual identities and adds to theoretical debates around the challenge to dominant gender and sexuality binaries posed by bisexuality.

Key terms: female bisexuality, sexual orientation, same-sex sexuality, women, gender, discourse analysis, feminist theory, poststructuralist theory, social constructionism, South Africa.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND RATIONALE

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, p. 17)

1.1 Introduction

In this qualitative study I set out to explore the discourses that construct the gendered and sexualised subjectivities of a group of South African women who identify as bisexual. In societies where heterosexuality remains normative, those who claim sexual identities that do not maintain the presumed "natural" relationship between sex, gender and sexuality are often considered unintelligible (Butler, 1990). It is this rupture from heteronormativity and its consequences that the current study will explore. In conducting the study I assume a poststructuralist feminist approach and use a discourse analytic framework for the analysis of the texts resulting from interviews with self-identified bisexual women. This chapter begins with a brief note on the role of language in constructing categories of identity such as "bisexual". This is followed by an introduction to the academic and personal contexts within which the research question was formulated. I then provide the aims and objectives that guided the study and conclude the chapter with an outline of the structure of the dissertation.

1.2 Language and identity

In assuming a poststructuralist position in this study, I resist universalising tendencies in research that posit categories such as bisexuality as fixed and essentialised. A poststructuralist approach to language and subjectivity is critical of the reification of categories of identity. Instead, subjectivity is regarded as fragmented and in flux (Weedon, 1987). Categories of sexuality are socially constructed and do not reflect an inherent fixed nature of individuals. While I value such resistance to the reification of categories of identity, I also support the need to (cautiously) draw on such categories in a manner that is always provisional, in order to allow for increased visibility of bisexuality in research accounts. Consistent with this position, I am not concerned with identifying "real" bisexual women in this study, nor to depict a totalising account of bisexual experiences. Instead this study is concerned with how meanings around bisexuality are created and negotiated, and how such meanings position participants who self-identify as bisexual.

A widely used description of bisexuality is as an “experience of erotic, emotional, and sexual attraction to persons of more than one gender” (Firestein, 1996, p. xix). James (1996) provides a description of bisexuality as “the sexual or intensely emotional although not necessarily concurrent or equal, attraction of an individual to members of more than one gender” (p. 218). Firestein (1996) further indicates that the terms “bisexual identity” and “bisexually-identified” commonly refer to individuals who have made a conscious decision to adopt a label indicating their bisexual orientation. The implication of this is that some individuals might demonstrate what could be considered bisexual behaviour but might not identify themselves as bisexual, while others might self-identify as bisexual without engaging in bisexual behaviours. These descriptions point to the contested nature of the term bisexual and subsequent chapters will further explore the various ways in which bisexuality has been constructed in dominant discourse.

1.3 Locating the study

In this section I consider the academic context in which the current study is located. I briefly describe how bisexuality is positioned in research conducted in different academic domains – that of traditional psychological and social science research; the field of LGBTI psychology and queer studies; and finally the emerging subfield of bisexuality studies. Through this brief contextualisation, I highlight a number of oversights in the research landscape. I conclude with a consideration of my personal context, as it informs the current study.

1.3.1 The monosexual assumption and bisexual invisibility

The international academic context in which this study is conducted is one in which heteronormativity remains pervasive. Historically, research in the field of sexualities has had an implicit focus on heterosexuality with little consideration of other expressions of sexuality (Bullough & Bullough, 1997). However, as this research focus has expanded to consider sexualities that do not conform to the heterosexual norm, a heterosexual/homosexual binary has emerged (Fox, 2004). Such a monosexual binary, within which heterosexuality and homosexuality are posited as the only legitimate categories of sexuality, has pervaded much of the research conducted in sexuality studies broadly and psychology specifically (Fox, 2004). As the literature review in subsequent chapters will indicate, bisexuality is not easily conceived of as a legitimate category of sexual identification and research studies have perpetuated this through assigning research participants that do not neatly fit binary categories, as either heterosexual or homosexual. An example can be found in the often-encountered tendency in anthropological research in African contexts to describe same-sex

behaviour in otherwise “heterosexual” individuals as situational bisexuality (e.g., Evans-Pritchard, 1970; Herskovits, 1938).

This monosexual assumption is also reflected in many social science studies, with Rust (2000) noting that much of the research prior to the 1980s conceptualised bisexuality as “a lesser degree of ‘homosexual’ experience, as the intermediate range on a heterosexual-homosexual continuum, or as a matter of ‘diversity among homosexuals’” (p. 5). Data on bisexual individuals were often “forced” into a heterosexual/homosexual conceptualisation of sexuality, regardless of individual self-identification of sexuality (Carr, 2006; 2011). In this manner sexuality is persistently organised into the two discrete categories that constitute the monosexual binary, causing bisexuality to be erased from social science research accounts.

1.3.2 Bisexual practice and HIV risk: The threat of “bisexual infectors”

Through a narrow focus on bisexual practice and risk, bisexuality has attained a measure of visibility in “mainstream” academic research, with “the vast majority of research on bisexuality focus[ing] only on behaviour in the context of sexually transmitted infections and HIV” (Elia & Eliason, 2012, p. 9). Consequently a large body of research investigates the “threat” of bisexual men introducing HIV to their female heterosexual partners (e.g., Millet, Malebranche, Mason, & Spikes, 2005; Montgomery, Mokotoff, Gentry, & Blair, 2003; Stokes, McKirnan, Doll, & Burzette, 1996). Worth (2011, p. 488) refers to a construction of “the bisexual infector” as dangerous, secretive and promiscuous and as informing much of this research. In addition to stigmatising effects, this focus on sexual behaviour and risk has restricted the focus of international studies and has consequently excluded research related to bisexual identity construction, as opposed to bisexual practice.

A similar narrow focus is evident in South African research, with the impact of the HIV and AIDS epidemic resulting in research exploring sexualities predominantly doing so in relation to HIV risk (Shefer, 1999). Considering that the present nature of the epidemic is such that HIV transmission occurs mainly through heterosexual intercourse (Walker & Gilbert, 2002), research interest in groups claiming other sexual identities has been limited. The emerging exception to this is a renewed interest in research focusing on men who identify as heterosexual but engage in sexual activity with men (e.g., Knox, Yi, Reddy, Maimane, & Sandfort, 2010; Lane et al., 2011; Smith, Tapsoba, Peshu, Sanders, & Jaffe, 2009), mirroring the international focus on male bisexual behaviour. This has resulted in the limited attention that bisexuality receives in South African research being almost exclusively directed to male bisexual practice and the implications thereof for HIV transmission.

Consequently, studies that explore bisexual identities instead of bisexual practice, with female samples as opposed to male, are entirely absent from the South African context, motivating my choice to focus on female bisexual identities in this project.

1.3.3 Bisexuality in the context of LGBTI psychology and queer studies

While a monosexual binary traditionally informed much of “mainstream” social science research, LGBTI¹ psychology as a subfield within psychological research has largely perpetuated such a binary. Petford (2003) cites the following excerpt from an editorial in the journal *Lesbian & Gay Psychology Review*, to illustrate how bisexuality (and transgender psychology) has generally been marginalised in LGBTI psychological research:

When the BPS [British Psychological Society] Lesbian and Gay Psychology Section was established in 1998, some criticism was voiced about its failure to include transgender and bisexual psychology in its title. The reason for this was that in order to meet the criteria for a Section, we first had to identify a substantial British psychological literature on the proposed Section’s focal topics. While we could do this for lesbian and gay psychology, we were unable to do the same for transgender and bisexual psychology. We therefore decided to proceed with the attempt to establish a Lesbian and Gay Psychology Section and resolved that, once this was achieved, we would work to foster the development of transgender and bisexual psychology in Britain, with the ultimate aim of ensuring that they qualify for inclusion in the section title. (p. 6)

In addition to such a general exclusion of bisexuality, LGBTI psychology has also been characterised by a male bias in that most studies are concerned with the realities of gay men, at the expense of those of lesbian and bisexual women (Phillips, Ingram, Smith, & Mindes, 2003; Sell & Petruccio, 1996). The focus on male homosexuality has rendered women’s same-sex sexualities largely invisible, with Wilton (1995) describing how women “have been effectively ‘written out’ of the academy, whether as scholar or object of study, for centuries” (p. 17).

In the small body of work that constitutes South African LGBTI psychology, a similar dearth of research with a specific focus on bisexuality is evident. Topics explored in South African LGBTI psychology include lesbian family configurations (Lubbe, 2007; 2009); mental health of gay men and lesbians (Nel, Rich, & Joubert, 2007; Polders, Nel, Kruger, & Wells, 2008); issues around gay and lesbian relationships (Blythe & Straker, 1996; Henderson & Shefer, 2008); gay and lesbian disclosure

¹ LGBTI refers to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex.

(Butler & Astbury, 2008); experiences of “black” lesbians (Arndt & Hewat, 2009; Potgieter, 2003); and violence against gay men and lesbians (Nel & Judge, 2008; Reddy, Potgieter, & Mkhize, 2007). Only two South African studies related to bisexuality could be identified: First, Blumberg and Soal (1997) conducted a focus group discussion with seven self-identified bisexual women, the findings of which are reviewed in Chapter 4. Second, De Bruin and Arndt (2010) explored attitudes towards bisexual men and women among a sample of university students in South Africa. This study did not however focus on the subjectivities of self-identified bisexual men and women and was a quantitative exploration of attitudes towards bisexuality more generally. A search of the *South African Journal of Psychology* as well as the database PsychINFO yielded no South African studies with a focus on bisexuality, indicating a marked silence in South African research. The male bias of international research in LGBTI psychology is also reflected in South African research, with De Bruin and Arndt (2010) noting that “existing studies in South Africa have dealt mainly with White middle-class gay men” (p. 235).

One field of academic study in which one might expect a burgeoning of research focused on bisexuality, is queer studies. Queer studies is a body of work defined by its resistance to heteronormativity, where the term queer is used to refer not only to gay and lesbian identities, but to any position that resists the normalised sex/gender/sexual identity system (Seidman, 1996). It is described as a positionality that is “not restricted to lesbians and gay men but is in fact available to anyone who is or who feels marginalised because of her or his sexual practices” (Halperin, 1995, p. 62). The inclusive character of queer studies indicates a clear potential for bisexuality to attain greater visibility within its ambit. However, as I will indicate in the literature review in subsequent chapters, queer studies has largely failed to contribute to greater bi-visibility precisely due to its inclusive character. The lack of specificity in the term has largely resulted in bisexuality being elided in the umbrella focus of queer. For instance, Namaste (1994) notes that queer studies often only includes bisexuality by name and that “most other scholars writing under the label consider only lesbian and gay subject positions” (p. 229).

1.3.4 The emerging field of bisexuality studies

Despite growing in prominence as a distinct academic field, bisexuality studies have “mostly existed in the shadows of gay and lesbian studies, and more recently it has been in the shadow of transgender studies as well” (Elia & Eliason, 2012, p. 4). Bisexuality as a field of academic study only emerged in the 1980s and 1990s, with most of the initial studies being focused on pleas for the legitimacy of bisexuality, or on accounts that resist negative stereotypes of bisexuality (Elia &

Eliason, 2012). During the last decade, its prominence has grown and in 2000 the *Journal of Bisexuality* was born from the need to have an explicit academic focus on bisexuality studies as distinct from gay or lesbian studies (Barker, 2007). To date this remains the only journal dedicated to research about bisexuality (Elia & Eliason, 2012).

With the emergence of bisexuality studies the narrow focus on bisexual behaviour that characterised mainstream social science research has been extended to include a broader array of research topics as they relate to bisexuality. A review indicates that the most commonly researched topics in the field of bisexuality studies include bisexual invisibility (e.g., Barker & Langdridge, 2008; Gurevich, Bower, Mathieson, & Dhayanandhan, 2007); bisexuality and non-monogamous/polyamorous relationships (e.g., McLean, 2004; Mint, 2004; Rust, 1996; Weitzman, 2006); bisexuality and HIV/AIDS (e.g., Kennedy & Doll, 2001; Lawrence & Queen, 2001; Miller, 2002; Rila, 1996); media representations of bisexuality (e.g., Barker, Bowes-Catton, Cassidy, Iantaffi, & Brewer, 2008; Capulet, 2010; Jonathan, 2007); negative stereotypes of bisexuality (e.g., Eliason, 1997; Israel & Mohr, 2004; Klesse, 2011); definitions of bisexual identities (e.g., Berenson, 2002; Fox, 1995; Rust, 2001); models of bisexual identity formation (e.g., Bradford, 2004; Brown, 2002; Knous, 2005); and bisexuality and transgender issues (e.g., Hemmings, 1996; Jonathan, 2003; Mathy, Lehmann, & Kerr, 2003; Weiss, 2003).

It appears that bisexuality studies has for the most part been able to avoid the overemphasis on male sexuality that has pervaded LGBTI psychology, with 25% of published studies in the *Journal of Bisexuality* being focused on bisexual women, compared to 13% that focus on bisexual men² (Elia & Eliason, 2012). Of the topics cited above that are most commonly researched in the field of bisexuality studies, those that relate to bisexual women specifically include the invisibility of bisexual women (e.g., Macalister, 2003; Stobie, 2003); media representations of female bisexuality (e.g., Diamond, 2005; San Filippo, 2007); negative stereotypes of bisexual women (e.g., Klesse, 2005; Ochs, 1996); and bisexual women and non-monogamous/polyamorous relationships (e.g., Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2004; Pallotta-Chiarolli & Lubowitz, 2003; Ritchie & Barker, 2007). Commonly researched topics that appear to be relevant to bisexual women specifically include bisexual women's friendships (e.g., Galupo, 2006; Thompson, 2007; Weinstock, 2006); and bisexual women and lesbian hostility (e.g., Hartman, 2005; Rust, 1993).

² These authors note that 62% of articles had a shared focus on both bisexual men and women (Elia & Eliason, 2012).

Notably absent from the commonly researched topics in bisexuality studies broadly as well as from research related to bisexual women in particular, is an explicit focus on how self-identified bisexual individuals treat notions of gender and sexuality. This absence becomes even more conspicuous when one considers the common construction of bisexuality that informs most of the studies cited here. The majority of these studies draw on a construction of bisexuality as transgressing gender and sexuality binaries (e.g., Hartman, 2005; Macalister, 2003; Pallotta-Chiarolli & Lubowitz, 2003). For instance, Hartman (2005) briefly notes that bisexuality appears to refuse binary classification, stating “while it is often difficult to survive in a binary system when one refuses to choose, there is agency in not forcing oneself into a category” (p. 66). Pallotta-Chiarolli and Lubowitz (2003) mention that for bisexually-identified individuals, sexualised and gendered identities are “not fixed and dichotomous, but rather fluid, transitory, fragmented [and] episodic” (p. 59). Yet such a construction of bisexuality as subverting dominant binaries remains implicit in these studies and is not further elaborated on in relation to participants’ accounts.

As I will argue in subsequent chapters, a similar construction of bisexuality as transgressive is echoed in theories of bisexuality. For example, Firestein (1996, p. xix) describes bisexuality as “a concept with the potential to revolutionise Western culture’s understanding of sex, gender, and sexual orientation” and Owen (2003) notes that bisexuality entails “a destabilisation of categories” (p. 44). Strikingly, empirical work exploring this potential in the accounts of self-identified bisexual individuals remains scarce, pointing to an oversight in research in the field of bisexuality studies. The current study aims to address this oversight through exploring how gendered and sexualised subjectivity are negotiated in the accounts of self-identified bisexual women.

1.3.5 A note on context: Sexual rights and hate crimes

In this section I conclude my efforts to locate the current study in the broader academic context by briefly considering sexual rights and the South African context. Research focusing on same-sex sexuality in South Africa is conducted against a backdrop of stark discrepancies between the legal protection of sexual orientation that has been secured and discriminative practices that occur at grassroots levels. In most African countries active prosecution and persecution of gay, lesbian and bisexual individuals still continue (Anyamele, Lwabaayi, Nguyen, & Binswanger, 2005). South Africa differs in that sexual orientation was enshrined as a protected status in the constitution in 1996 and legal protection against discrimination based on sexual orientation is in place (Isaack, 2003). Same-sex civil unions are legally recognised through legislation introduced in 2006 (De Vos & Barnard, 2007). Such constitutional and legal protection however does not mean that everyday prejudice and

marginalisation based on sexual orientation does not occur - discrimination persists and there are “patterns of violent harassment” of women in same-sex relationships, particularly in South African townships (Motswaping, 2010, p. 103). More recently the occurrence of corrective rape - a phenomenon where lesbian and bisexual women are raped in an attempt to “cure” them of their “abnormal” sexuality - has increasingly received public attention (Actionaid, n.d.). Gender inequality also remains common in South Africa and female sexuality is mainly constructed in relation to patriarchal systems that privilege heterosexuality (Shefer, 1999). It is against this backdrop of stark discrepancies between a human rights discourse and gendered and sexual violence that the current study is conducted.

To summarise, considering the relative lack of South African studies exploring bisexuality broadly and bisexual women’s realities specifically, this study aims to contribute to increased visibility of South African bisexual women’s lives in academic accounts. Further to this, in light of the lack of international research that empirically investigates bisexuality’s challenge to dominant binaries, the study also aims to contribute to theories of bisexuality through exploring how gendered and sexualised subjectivity is negotiated in the accounts of self-identified bisexual women. To this end, I undertake a discourse analytic study with a small sample of participants to allow for in-depth and rich analysis of possible instances in which oppositional binaries are confounded in bisexual women’s accounts, to explore the conditions that allow such troubling moments, and to identify some of the constraints placed by dominant discourses on the subversive potential of bisexuality.

1.3.6 Researching bisexuality: The politics of self-disclosure

Research is never conducted solely in an academic context; my involvement in the research process and my personal context also shape this study. Feminist poststructuralist research promotes self-reflexivity in the research process and emphasises the necessity to reflect on how “the researcher’s social identity, investments in the research, ideological commitments and role in the research process” contribute to the research (Boonzaier & Shefer, 2006, p. 9). My own commitment to a conceptualisation of identities as fluid informed my initial interest in researching bisexuality. I have often questioned the feasibility of claiming a neatly defined and “fixed” identity such as heterosexual or homosexual and instead valued variability in sexual identities. My initial interest in researching bisexuality solidified into a clear focus when I conducted a preliminary literature search and could only find a handful of South African studies focusing on bisexual women, emphasising the need for more local academic accounts representing bisexual women’s realities. My growing investment in

feminist research and my desire to conduct research that is strongly related to women's lives further influenced by decision to conduct this study.

Shefer (1999) notes that researchers studying sexualities are often sexualised themselves through their association with and interest in the research topic. She describes the sense of transgression when asked about her research dealing with heterosexual subjectivity:

When I was asked, as one is frequently, what I was researching, I found myself always hesitating - a brief, surprising moment tinged with embarrassment - before responding. And then, my words were rapid, attempting to explain, to contextualise the research interest, as if somehow I had to excuse myself and legitimate this questionable focus. This was achieved through outlining the research within the context of AIDS, STDs, violence against women, and I would work towards this point with some urgency. (p. 15)

Shefer's (1999) description struck a chord as, in the process of conducting this study, I often found myself in a position where I felt I had to justify the academic merit of researching bisexuality when discussing this project with others. I had the sense that the discomfort in explaining my research topic was heightened by my focus on a sexual identification that differs from "normal" heterosexuality. At times I would resort to vague descriptions of a broad interest in studying female sexuality or "gender issues", in an attempt to avoid the often-encountered awkward responses when mentioning my specific focus on bisexuality.

Researching sexualities opens up one's own sexual identification and experiences for questioning in a way that, perhaps significantly, does not occur when researching more "traditional" topics. The researcher becomes visible as a person "with sexual interest, sexual desires [and] sexual experiences" in a manner that compels further explanation (Shefer, 1999, p. 16). While conducting this study I found this process of heightened visibility of my identity invasive and uncomfortable at times, particularly as a woman in my late twenties attempting to establish my identity as an academic. I wanted to achieve academic credibility and felt frustrated when I discussed my research and found others focusing more on aspects of my own sexual identification than on the value of my research focus. However, at other times I appreciated the manner in which such an awareness of my presence in the study forced me to interrogate my constant involvement in the research. Perhaps a benefit of the sexualisation of researchers in this field is that it helps to resist a view of research as removed from the identity and experiences of the researcher and forces a self-reflexive praxis in

research. I comment on relevant aspects of my positioning in the study throughout the dissertation and particularly in Chapter 5.

In the following section I detail the aims and objectives guiding the study.

1.4 Aims and objectives of the study

The aim of this study is to explore the gendered and sexualised discourses drawn on by a group of South African women who self-identify as bisexual, using semi-structured interviews to generate data. Specific objectives include:

- To explore the discourses that construct bisexuality as a discursive object in the talk of self-identified bisexual women;
- To explore how gendered and sexualised subjectivity are negotiated in the accounts of self-identified bisexual women;
- To explore the relationship between the discourses present in participants' accounts, and the institutions (such as social, political and material structures) encountered in their contexts.

1.5 Outline of the dissertation

In the current chapter I introduced the research topic and described aspects of the academic and personal contexts in which it developed. I also presented the aims and objectives guiding the study.

In Chapter 2 I discuss the theoretical framework that informed the study. I discuss some of the main tenets of feminist poststructuralism and the manner in which subjectivity is theorised from such a position. The focus in this chapter is on Foucauldian and Derridean theory, as it informs my approach in the current study. I also consider the role of discourse in knowledge production.

In Chapter 3 I provide an overview of the manner in which sex, genders and sexualities have been theorised in social science. I particularly attend to Judith Butler's poststructuralist challenge to theorising these constructs in an essentialist manner. Her interpretation of Foucauldian and Derridean theory concludes my discussion of the theoretical footing of this study. Finally, I also review how female sexuality in particular has been constructed in social science research over time.

In Chapter 4 I review existing literature about bisexuality with the aim of describing how bisexuality has historically been constructed.

In Chapter 5 I describe the research process with a specific focus on the process of recruiting participants, data collection and data analysis.

In Chapter 6 I elaborate on the participants and the interview contexts. I also present the first section of the results and discussion of the discourse analysis.

In Chapter 7 I present the second section of the results and discussion of the discourse analysis.

In Chapter 8 I extend my discussion of the discourses presented in Chapters 6 and 7. I focus the discussion on key theoretical debates in bisexuality studies, as these relate to the findings of the current study. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the limitations of the study, as well as suggestions for future research related to female bisexuality.

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter I provide an overview of the ontological and epistemological influences that shaped my approach in the present study. Willig (2008) refers to the notion of epistemological reflexivity as the continual process during research of reflecting upon our assumptions about knowledge and about the world, and how these assumptions might impact on the research process and the findings. The theoretical framework that I employ in this study is that of feminist poststructuralism, a choice which had clear implications for the manner in which I approached the research topic. In this chapter I delineate the theoretical implications of assuming such an approach. I focus in particular on the work of poststructuralist theorists Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault, while the subsequent chapter focuses on Judith Butler's engagement with Derridean and Foucauldian theory as it relates to her deconstructive critique of sex, gender and sexuality which informed the current study.

Feminist poststructuralism is heavily influenced by postmodernism. Namaste (1994) notes that postmodernism and poststructuralism do not refer to two monolithic theoretical positions but instead designate collections of diverse theoretical positions. Very few theorists who are assigned to the categories "postmodern" or "poststructuralist" agree on all theoretical issues, and some position themselves in startling contrast to other authors who might be superficially lumped into the same theoretical camp. Many texts also use the terms postmodernism and poststructuralism interchangeably (Namaste, 1994). This lack of clear definition is further encouraged by a shared disavowal of fixed boundaries promoted by the two positions (Gavey, 1997). For the purposes of this discussion, however, I will only briefly discuss some of the main tenets of postmodern theory before providing a more detailed discussion of poststructuralist principles useful in feminist research. In doing so, I follow a conceptualisation of postmodernism as a broader social movement with ontological implications for social science research, and a conceptualisation of poststructuralism as one of various schools of thought born out of the postmodern moment. Poststructuralism also informs epistemological and methodological considerations in the present study.

The impression that postmodernists and poststructuralists differ in focus is echoed by Rosenau (1992) who states that "postmodernists are more oriented toward cultural critique while the post-structuralists emphasise method and epistemological matters. For example, post-structuralists concentrate on deconstruction, language, discourse, meaning and symbols while post-modernists

cast a broader net” (p. 3). Agger (1991) describes the difference in focus in the following manner: “poststructuralism (Derrida, the French feminists) is a theory of knowledge and language, whereas postmodernism (Foucault, Barthes, Lyotard, Baudrillard) is a theory of society, culture, and history” (p. 112). These distinctions are of course to a large extent artificial, as both approaches share ontological and epistemological assumptions (Alvesson, 2002). However, poststructuralism, as the discussion below will illustrate, has clear implications for knowledge production and provides useful tools for analysing how meaning is created, negotiated and disrupted. In the context of the present study, it therefore made sense for me to conceptualise it as a movement existing within the broader postmodern project, and use it as an epistemological and methodological framework.

I start the discussion in this chapter by briefly noting some of the key developments in postmodern thought. These developments provide the context within which poststructuralism emerged as one of many groupings within the postmodern project. I then continue to discuss poststructuralist theory in more detail, focussing on Derridean deconstruction in particular. I also consider a Foucauldian conceptualisation of discourse and power before concluding with a consideration of how feminist theorists have appropriated poststructuralist theory.

2.2 Postmodernism and the turn to language

Defining postmodernism is problematic due to the resistance within postmodernism to treat theoretical positions in a foundationalist manner, and most theorists who can be regarded as working from a postmodern position eschew such a classification (Best & Kellner, 1991). In attempting to clarify postmodernist thought, many authors resort to contrasting it with modernity, as postmodernism emerged as a grouping of diverse theoretical positions that challenged modernist assumptions (Best & Kellner, 1991). Lyotard (1984) describes the modernist project as “any science that legitimates itself with reference to an explicit appeal to some grand narrative, such as the dialectics of Spirit, the hermeneutics of meaning, the emancipation of the rational or working subject, or the creation of wealth” (p. xxiii). Postmodernism can then be described as a grouping of positions that resists the certainty espoused by the grand narratives of modernism (Lyotard, 1984). Postmodernism rejects the modernist view that knowledge about the world represents reality in a direct manner and instead argues that reality is socially constructed through language (Gergen, 1985).

Gergen (1994, p. 414) argues that it is useful to resist regarding postmodernism as yet another totalitarian discourse and instead view it as “an invitation to reflexivity” whereby a communicative

space is created. Such an approach allows for the questioning of taken-for-granted assumptions about knowledge and about the world (Gergen, 2001). The discussion below will focus on a few core theoretical strands forming part of postmodern thought – the crisis of representation, the socially constructed character of reality, the postmodern commitment to anti-foundationalism, and the view of the subject as fragmentary.

2.2.1 The crisis of representation

Postmodern critiques of the correspondence theory of language question the taken-for-granted belief that the language we use to describe the world corresponds to an observed reality (Gergen, 2001). These critiques, referred to as the crisis of representation, posit that language cannot be taken as reflecting reality in a mirror-like manner.

Drawing on structuralist Ferdinand de Saussure's (1972/1983) conceptualisation of language as a system of signs, the idea that language represents reality in a direct and accurate manner is contested. Saussure critiques the supposedly natural relationship between the signifier and signified. In his description the signifier is the word (such as hat, chair, anger and so forth) which is used to refer to or correspond with an object or phenomenon in the world (Gergen, 2001). Saussure argues that the relationship between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary, in that the system of language in use at a particular time is inherited and based on socially accepted conventions – there is no predetermined logic or motivation for the coupling of a particular signifier with a particular object or phenomenon to which it is intended to refer, as in principle any word can be chosen to refer to any object (Gergen, 2001; Saussure, 1972/1983). A signifier does not relate an essence or true meaning of the signified. Instead, the meaning of a word (signifier) is always understood in relation to other words (Saussure, 1972/1983).

The structuralist effort to destabilise the fixity of meaning in language was extended by poststructuralists such as Derrida with his theory of the indeterminacy of language. Derridean analyses illustrate that there is no univocal, unchallengeable reading of a text; instead there are competing meanings (Agger, 1991). These meanings are always incomplete because the attempt to construct the meaning of a text as final and complete will always entail excluding other versions of meaning (Agger, 1991). When reading a text, the reader creates his or her own meaning and intent of the text - a process which is influenced by the reader's subjectivity. Postmodern theorists have argued that this is similar for all situations where meaning is created, and has the implication that meanings are multiple (Barthes, 1968/1977). Reading a text becomes an act of constructing meaning

and not a passive activity (Agger, 1991) and the certainty of a fixed, pre-existing meaning that corresponds to an underlying reality becomes impossible (Gergen 2001).

2.2.2 Reality as socially constructed

A significant implication of the crisis of representation is that language becomes central to the construction of objects (Alvesson, 2002). Postmodernism rejects a view of reality as revealing itself to us in a pure and direct manner through our descriptions of it. There is no essential meaning in our experiences or our perception of reality prior to language and discourse. Instead, postmodern theorists regard discourse as constituting experience (Alvesson, 2002).

The conceptualisation of discourse used in the current study is strongly influenced by poststructuralist theory, drawing on elements of Foucauldian and Derridean thought. Discourse can be described as an interrelated “system of statements which cohere around common meanings and values [that] are a product of social factors, of powers and practices, rather than an individual’s set of ideas” (Hollway, 1983, p. 231). Parker’s (1992) tentative definition describes discourse as “a system of statements which constructs an object” (p. 5). A Foucauldian use of the term discourse then includes not only linguistic features of social life but also includes the effects of broader structures in shaping subjective experience (Willig, 2008). Discourse structures our experience as well as our subjectivity, since experience only becomes intelligible through discourse (Alvesson, 2002). The implication of this is that reality does not exist independently of our observation but is instead constructed through the accounts we offer of it, i.e. through language (Gergen, 2001).

2.2.3 Anti-foundationalism

Postmodernism is critical of the manner in which positions have called on legitimising narratives or foundations (Lyotard, 1984). Theoretical positions have traditionally appealed to master narratives in order to present their grounding as secure and inevitable (Alvesson, 2002). For example, positivism has promoted a totalising view that stipulates that one can study the world without the imposition of theoretical or ideological assumptions (Agger, 1991). Through the process of scientific enquiry one can obtain knowledge that reflects the world like a mirror and that is not “tainted” by ideology. However, postmodernist critiques have illustrated that positivism is itself an ideology; the influence of positivism extends beyond scientific investigation to promoting the notion that one should accept the world as it presents itself uncritically (Agger, 1991). The grand narrative of positivism describes the current social order as natural and large-scale social change becomes unimaginable within such a view. Instead of viewing social processes as historically constructed, they

are regarded as inevitable and therefore not contested (Agger, 1991). The master narrative of positivism has then promoted a dominant view of the world which is falsely presented as secure and certain (Alvesson, 2002). Postmodern theorists are distrustful of such legitimising moves and argue that these grand narratives have lost their credibility (Lyotard, 1984).

Modernism compels a desire for certainty and specific legitimating criteria through which a grand narrative's claims can be grounded. Such certainty creates a "violence to the other" through marginalising certain groups of people, such as women or sexual minorities (Hepburn, 1999a, p. 3). In this manner modernism's grand narratives gain the assent of the masses in support of a specific view of reality and delegitimises other views that run counter to its ideology (Hepburn, 1999a).

The ability of grand narratives to gain consensus relies on upholding a view of knowledge as stable and universal. Postmodern analyses however illustrate that we do not have privileged access to reality, and therefore we cannot promote one version of the world over another (Lyotard, 1984). If one acknowledges that meaning is not universal or stable, then it follows that one cannot make generalising or universal claims about phenomena (Alvesson, 2002). Instead, postmodernism acknowledges that one can only tell "small" stories defined by the multiplicity of subject positions of individuals and groups, as they are constructed in a particular point in history (Agger, 1991). Knowledge about the social world is contextual and "social science becomes an accounting of social experience from these multiple perspectives of discourse/practice, rather than a larger cumulative enterprise committed to the inference of general principles of social structure and organisation" (Agger, 1991, p. 117). Instead of totalising accounts, postmodern social science then attempts to present local, fragmented narratives that are bound to particular contexts (Lyotard, 1984).

2.2.4 Fragmenting the subject

Within a postmodern formulation, reality is socially constructed through discourse (Gergen, 2001). This view also extends to how the subject is conceptualised. Postmodernism is critical of the Enlightenment (modernist) formulation of the subject, and instead promotes a view of the subject as constituted in multiple ways (Alvesson, 2002). Postmodernism holds that the self is not a separate and unitary identity but that it is constituted through discourse (Weedon, 1987). Mainstream psychology has typically upheld the humanist conceptualisation of the self as rational, stable and coherent (Gavey, 1997). The view of the rational subject implied a view of humans as free and fully conscious, and therefore self-knowable (Sarup, 1993). In this view of the subject, the individual exists separately from social or historical processes and is an autonomous agent (Sarup, 1993). There

is no consideration for the constitutive effects of discourse and individual identity is considered as having a coherent, stable core, or an essence (Alvesson, 2002).

Postmodernism decentres this notion of the self and suggests a subjectivity that is “precarious, contradictory and in process, constantly being reconstituted in discourse each time we think or speak” (Weedon, 1987, p. 33). The subject is formulated as being constituted through discursive practices, and thereby as occupying varied, and potentially contradictory, positions in discourse (Henriques, Hollway, Urwin, Venn, & Walkerdine, 1984). Individuals are positioned by and also take up different subject positions available in discourse, with the implication that identity is fluid and fragmentary (Alvesson, 2002). Different strands of identity constitute what we regard as a person – discursively constructed aspects of social existence such as gender, race, sexual orientation and class contribute in complex ways to how identity is negotiated (Nicholson, 1990).

Having pointed briefly to some of the key tenets of postmodern thought, the rest of this chapter will explore poststructuralist theory, drawing heavily on the work of Derrida and Foucault. I begin by discussing some key ideas in Derridean deconstruction, followed by a discussion of Foucault’s work on discourse, power/knowledge, and disciplinary technologies.

2.3 Derridean deconstruction

Poststructuralism is a grouping of theoretical positions formulated to radically extend the claims made by structuralism. Poststructuralism expanded the structuralist focus on the linguistic to also include how power operates in the construction of social reality (Sarup, 1993). Poststructuralists agree with structuralists such as Saussure’s contention that the relationship between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary and that meaning is relational – words gain their meaning not from essential properties inherent to them but from the manner in which they relate to and are different from other words (Saussure, 1972/1983). They however extend this structuralist argument to also consider the deployment of language in the service of constituting particular versions of reality, human experience and subjectivity (Hepburn, 1999b). Poststructuralist deconstruction is a useful tool in analyses that attempt to illustrate how categories are constructed to appear natural, neutral and fixed, yet are deployed to create and recreate exclusions and marginalisations in the service of particular political aims (Hepburn, 1999b). To this end the principles of deconstruction proposed by poststructuralist theorist Jacques Derrida have proven useful to poststructuralist feminist theorists (Hepburn, 1999a).

Derridean deconstruction can be described as the “strategies and tactics which highlight potential disruptions *already contained within the text*” (Hepburn, 1999b, p. 641, emphasis in original). Deconstruction cannot be treated as a preformulated method that can be brought to bear on a text, or as the “taking apart of existing constructions” (Hepburn, 1999a, ¶15). Deconstruction relates more to an awareness of the manner in which a text already subverts its own logic; there is no underlying meaning independent of our own constructions that can be accessed through deconstruction (Hepburn, 1999a). Derrida (1976) notes that deconstructing discourse is a process of “explicitly and systematically posing the problem of the status of a discourse which borrows from a heritage the resources necessary for the deconstruction of that heritage itself” (p. 289). One cannot escape from the heritage one is attempting to deconstruct and instead has to draw on the heritage itself for the tools to subvert it. By lifting out aspects of the text which are made invisible by the dominant narratives organising the text, the seemingly natural and neutral logic of the text is disrupted (Hepburn, 1999b). In this sense deconstruction is an approach to texts that allows us to subvert and disrupt the claims to truth made by texts while acknowledging that we cannot step outside of the understandings that inform those claims (Hepburn, 1999a).

It can be emphasised that deconstruction does not imply a simple obliteration of linguistic categories. Butler (1995) states the following in this regard:

To deconstruct the subject is not to negate or throw away the concept; on the contrary, deconstruction implies only that we suspend all commitments to that which the term ‘the subject’ refers, and that we consider the linguistic function it serves in the consolidation and concealment of authority. (p. 49)

Deconstruction attends to how terms are used in different contexts and what effects their uses have (Butler, 1995). Through deconstruction the terms used to construct subjectivity, such as “woman” or “bisexual”, can be subverted and redeployed in different ways and in the service of different political aims (Hepburn, 1999a).

In the following section I discuss the utility of deconstruction by referring to Derrida’s work on the undecidables of language, and specifically his conceptualisation of *différance* and supplementarity. I also consider the subversive potential of his undecidables for theorising bisexuality.

2.3.1 Différance

Derrida's notion of the undecidability of meaning is a critical response to the modernist belief in the representational nature of language. His argument for the undecidability of texts is informed by his theoretical notions of difference and *différance* (Derrida, 1976). Derrida (1976) argues that language operates on the principle that meaning is created only in relation to other meanings. A direct correspondence between words and an external reality is therefore not possible, as meaning is always produced in relation to other meanings and not in relation to a fixed reality to which it supposedly refers (Agger, 1991). In Derridean theory the elision *différance* is used to indicate how meaning is created in relation to other words and practices:

[One] cannot hope to arrive at a fixed or transparent meaning as long as one uses a necessarily deferring as well as differing language: Every definition and clarification needs to be defined and clarified in turn; meaning always lies elusively in the future. (Agger, 1991, p. 113)

As such, an object does not have an essential meaning that is signified by the name it has been assigned but instead derives its meaning from the "sets of oppositions and junctures, the relations that make it like and unlike other things" (Alvesson, 2002, p. 53). Language therefore functions as a symbolic "differencing" system, where signifiers depend on their dissimilarity from an absent trace for meaning (Derrida, 1976). In this manner categories such as the male/female binary have historically been constructed as oppositional but they are in fact interdependent as "they derive their meaning from a particularly established contrast rather than from some inherent or pure antithesis" (Scott, 1988, p. 37).

2.3.2 Supplementarity

Supplementarity is another of Derrida's undecidables and can be mobilised as a strategy to disrupt the logocentric claims to fixed meaning made by texts. In order to discuss supplementarity, I will first discuss what Derrida refers to when he describes texts as logocentric. I will also discuss the oppositional binaries evoked by texts in support of logocentric claims, before moving on to a discussion of what Derrida refers to as his "logic of supplementarity" (Derrida, 1976, p. 215).

Derridean deconstruction focuses on disrupting the dominant stories, or discourses, of fundamental truth created and recreated in texts (Hepburn, 1999a). This modernist desire for a centred truth, or logocentrism, is mobilised in texts through legitimising claims, which Derrida attempts to subvert

through deconstruction (Hepburn, 1999a). Derrida (1976) argues that the meaning of a term is constructed through a process of subordinating other terms that contribute to its meaning. Hepburn (1999b) notes that “this subordination of certain terms gives the *appearance* of some ordinary meaning or *logos*: the ‘presence’ or centre is privileged by hierarchical binary oppositions” (p. 643, emphasis in original).

Logocentric thought relies on such binary constructions which are drawn on and constructed by texts. Derridean deconstruction allows for the identification of the binary oppositions that construct seemingly natural categories, such as male/female, and the explication of the manner in which further related dualisms are called upon (such as rational/emotional or strong/weak). These binaries are typically employed in support of a particular construction of reality: a patriarchal worldview, for example, would employ “male”, “rational” and “strong” as positive terms with their oppositions being located in the negatively evaluated terms “female”, “emotional” and “weak” (Hepburn, 1999a). The value of a term then depends on the manner in which it supports the dominant reality or logocentric thought. Derridean deconstruction aims to recover the excluded term and reinscribe it as privileged (Hepburn, 1999a).

Binary thinking creates an either/or distinction that falsely assumes a fixed or complete point of reference for a signifier. In such binary thinking the privileged term is described as grounded in a foundational truth or *logos*, for example “male” or “rational”. This privileged term is considered as closer to the “full presence of meaning” (Hepburn, 1999b, p. 644) while its opposite term is described as completely “other” and as disrupting the order of logocentrism. Within the various dualisms used in modernist thought, the marginalised term (of negative value) is only seemingly separate from the dominant term as it in fact contributes to the meaning of the dominant term. Hepburn (1999b) articulates this clearly: “One side of an opposition does not exist in its own right, although the binary structure and logic create this illusion, obscuring the reliance of each term on its opposite” (p. 643). Derrida’s undecidability of meaning contests the logocentric construction of either/or binaries. He argues that signifiers have a supplementary character in that they are meant to add to some original absence (Hepburn, 1999b). However, since there is no fixed point of reference for a signifier, supplementarity takes on a double meaning in that the supplement “adds only to replace” (Derrida, 1976, p. 145). Derrida (1976) explains this in the following manner: On the one hand the supplement operates as a measure of presence, implied by the notion that it is a surplus added to something that is already complete; on the other, it is an indication of a void. The

supplement highlights how meaning is always constructed through a play between presence and absence:

As substitute, it is not simply added to the positivity of a presence, it produces no relief, its place is assigned in the structure by the mark of an emptiness. Somewhere, something can be filled up *of itself*, can accomplish itself, only by allowing itself to be filled through sign and proxy. The sign is always the supplement of the thing itself. (Derrida, 1976, p. 145, emphasis in original)

In Derridean deconstruction, the supplement is used to “expose a lack of completeness” (Hepburn, 1999b, p. 647-648). As a strategy in deconstructing texts, Derrida replaces the either/or distinction with his logic of supplementarity that relies on a both/and, neither/nor construction (Derrida, 1976). This allows one to illustrate the supplementary quality of terms that are presented in logocentric thought as fully present and already complete (Hepburn, 1999b). Important to note is that undecidables function to undermine the premise of binary constructions. I turn to this point in the next section, where I elaborate further on the implications of Derrida’s undecidables for deconstruction.

2.3.3 The subversive potential of undecidables

The subversive potential of Derrida’s undecidables of language lies in the manner in which undecidables defy binary logic. Undecidables are fusions that disrupt binary oppositions through inhabiting both sides of the opposition; in that manner, “it is not just the binaries themselves that are undermined but the logic on which they are based” (Jagger, 1996, p. 195). Collins (2005) offers the zombie as an example of Derrida’s undecidables, in that the zombie is neither alive nor truly dead – it functions as an undecidable in that it slips across both sides of binaries, such as presence/absence, life/death and good/evil, without properly fitting either.

In Derrida’s (1992) own work, an example of an undecidable can be found in his description of the virus, in that it is “a parasite that disrupts destination from the communicative point of view – disrupting writing, inscription, and the coding and decoding of inscription – and which on the other hand is neither alive or dead” (p. 12). Another example is in Derrida’s (1981) use of the word “hymen”, based on his account of its use in a text by Mallarmé. Derrida (1981) draws on the double meaning of the word, where it signifies both “membrane” and (in its more ancient use) “marriage”, to illustrate how it functions to designate “both the virginal intactness of the distinction between the inside and the outside” as well as “the erasing of that distinction through the commingling of self

and other” (Johnson, 1981, p. xxix). In this manner, Derrida’s deconstructive analysis of the use of “hymen” functions to deconstruct the “binary either/or logic of opposition and differences because it is a fusion, a both/and” (Jagger, 1996, p. 195). It functions as an undecidable in that it is able to at once inhabit both terms of an opposition while at the same time also confuse them, through being both interior and exterior to the opposition (Jagger, 1996, p. 195). Derrida (1992) articulates this as follows:

The undecidables, a theme often associated with deconstruction, is not merely the oscillation between two significations or two contradictory and very determinate rules.... The undecidables is not merely the oscillation or the tension between two decisions; it is the experience of that which, though heterogeneous, foreign to the order of the calculable and the rule, is still obliged.... to give itself up to the impossible decision, while taking account of law and rules. (p. 24)

It can be argued that bisexuality similarly functions as an undecidable through its relation to the heterosexuality/homosexuality binary – Hemmings (1997) notes that the history of bisexuality is marked by its presence in lesbian, gay and straight communities and that bisexuality “expresses itself in relation to those other terms” (p. 20). In that sense, bisexuality inhabits both heterosexuality and homosexuality and is both interior and exterior to these terms, but at the same time does not fit either category properly. I return to the transgressive potential of bisexuality in subsequent chapters. However, it can be emphasised that Derrida’s undecidables provide valuable tools with which to interrogate the production and regulation of borders in gendered and sexualised identities, particularly where these borders are blurred by non-normative sexualities such as bisexuality (Namaste, 1994).

In the following section I explore Foucault’s account of the social production of identities, with particular concern for how power is implicated in this process.

2.4 Foucault’s theory of discourse

Weedon (1987) notes that Foucault’s conceptualisation of discourse integrates two central aspects of poststructuralist thought - the instability of meaning and the acknowledgment of a discursively constituted subjectivity - into a theory of language that explicitly accounts for the role of power. It is Foucault’s extensive theorisation of power that has been particularly useful for feminist theorists in resisting and transforming oppressive discourses (Deveaux, 1994). In the following section I discuss Foucault’s (1976/1990; 1980) conceptualisation of power as diffuse and inextricably bound up with

knowledge. I also consider the possibilities for resistance within a Foucauldian conceptualisation of discourse and subjectivity.

2.4.1 Discourse and power

Foucault's analysis of power signalled a radical departure from more traditional social science conceptualisations of power as a property that can be identified and studied in its own right (Nicholson, 1990; Sawicki, 1986). Foucault rejects such a juridico-discursive view of power where power is regarded as having an essence that can be located and fixed; instead he regards power as existing in relationships and actions (Foucault, 1976/1990, 1982). His analysis is critical of modernist conceptions of power as residing in macrostructures or particular classes of persons – for Foucault (1980) power is not something that can be possessed or held onto. Instead, he provides a useful critique illustrating that power is diffuse and “resides in the discursive formation itself – the combination of a set of linguistic distinctions, ways of reasoning and material practices that together organise social institutions and produce particular forms of subjects” (Alvesson, 2002, p. 56). In this view power is productive in that power relations constitute subjects; discourses of sexuality, for example, create “acceptable” and “unacceptable” subjects through distinctions of what is regarded as normal or deviant. Individual subjectivity is then the effect of power (Foucault, 1976/1990).

For Foucault (1976/1990), power is not only a negative force that oppresses, subordinates or prohibits. Rather, he focuses his analysis on the productive character of power as it creates socially constituted versions of reality and subjectivity through discourse. Foucault (1976/1990, 1980) argues that the mechanisms of power are at their most effective through their productive effects. His description of the disciplinary power of the human sciences illustrates how objects of knowledge, such as “sexuality” or “madness”, are constructed through a historically situated process of creating distinctions and classifying “symptoms”. These forms of knowledge, such as psychology or psychiatry, are created as part of historically specific social processes of regulation and reform (Foucault, 1976/1990). Due to their claims to authoritative knowledge, these disciplinary practices become “effective means of normalisation and control” (Sawicki, 1986, p. 27).

In Foucauldian theory there is then an inextricable link between knowledge and power; power can only be exercised through knowledge, and knowledge inescapably engenders power (Foucault, 1980). Foucault (1980) contends that “power and knowledge directly imply one another, that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations” (p. 27). This effect of

power on individuals extends beyond the imposition of institutional or cultural practices to include the internalisation of norms that dominate within a particular social order (Foucault, 1980). In the following section I take up Foucault's (1977/1995) theory of disciplinary practices where he proposes different strategies through which individuals come to internalise dominant discourses.

2.4.2 Disciplinary technology

From the preceding discussion, the question arises as to *how* individuals take on the tenets of dominant discourses and through which mechanisms power relations operate. Foucault's (1977/1995) critique of juridico-discursive power provides an account of a new form of power that is not repressive but instead productive. He describes this new form of productive power as becoming prominent during a period termed the "threshold of modernity", a period characterised by the transition between the classical age associated with the seventeenth century and the modern age (West, 1996). Foucault (1977/1995) describes this time as characterised by a double operation in power, as the repressive conceptualisation of power is slowly altered by the presence of a more productive power that shapes individuals and populations. This occurs through the emergence of what Foucault (1984) terms "disciplinary technology" which concerns "the government of individuals, the government of the souls, the government of the self by the self, the government of families, the government of children, and so on" (p. 256).

Macleod and Durrheim (2002a) add that "disciplinary technology has as its aim the regulation and normalisation of subjects" (p. 48). For normalisation to take place, it is necessary to create distinctions between individuals and categorise them in relation to the norm. Foucault (1977/1995) describes how hierarchical observation functions to assign subjects to categories through observing, measuring, comparing and classifying. Hierarchical observation allows for "progressive objectification and the ever more subtle partitioning of individual behaviour" (Foucault, 1977/1995, p. 173). For instance, social science has created entire systems of observation and measurement, aimed at producing knowledge about individuals. When considered in relation to women's sexuality, it is possible to identify how power operates to "define, classify and categorise activities which establish fundamental 'truths' about our sexuality, shape the construction of our subjectivity and demarcate the boundaries of a normative (hetero)sexuality" (Forbes, 1996, p. 179). Through a proliferation of discourses of sexuality, knowledge of what is regarded as "normal" and "abnormal" is generated and on the basis of this knowledge, individuals are compared and hierarchically categorised (Foucault, 1977/1995).

Disciplinary power functions through such a process of hierarchisation and normalisation - it “compares, differentiates, hierarchises, homogenises [and] excludes”, and in that way produces a desire for subjects to conform to the norm or to risk being categorised as abnormal and “other” (Foucault, 1977/1995, p. 183). This hierarchisation, regulation and normalisation of subjects occur through different strategies, such as surveillance, bio-power and pastoral power (Foucault, 1977/1995). Below I discuss these strategies in turn.

2.4.2.1 Surveillance and technologies of the self

Foucault (1977/1995) uses the design of Jeremy Bentham’s model prison, the Panopticon, to describe how disciplinary power functions. The Panopticon, referred to by Foucault (1977/1995, p. 205) as “the diagram of a mechanism of power reduced to its ideal form”, is designed in such a manner that a supervisor in a central tower can observe all the inmates at all times, who are flooded with light and separated from each other in cells. This unequal gaze has the result that while the inmates are under constant surveillance, they are able to see neither the observer nor the other inmates. Foucault (1977/1995) uses the Panopticon to explain how this form of power functions to reform prisoners, but notes that discipline as an apparatus of power functions similarly in other contexts – it is “polyvalent in its applications; it serves to reform prisoners, but also to treat patients, to instruct schoolchildren, to confine the insane, to supervise workers, to put beggars and idlers to work” (p. 205). The panoptic schema allows for power to be exercised “spontaneously and without noise” (Foucault, 1977/1995, p. 206). Through constant surveillance it induces in the subject “a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power” (Foucault, 1977/1995, p. 201).

Modern power, however, does not simply exert its influence on subjects; individuals also internalise disciplinary practices and police their own identities. In light of the possibility of being observed from the tower at any time, the inmates take over the duty of policing themselves (Foucault, 1977/1995). Thus, “the gaze which is inscribed in the very structure of the disciplinary institution is internalised by the inmate; modern technologies of behaviour are thus oriented toward the production of isolated and self-policing subjects” (Bartky, 1988, p. 106). Through submitting to a process of constant self-surveillance, the disciplining gaze of dominant discourse acts on individuals through their own self-monitoring and the individual becomes “the principle of his own subjection” (Foucault, 1977/1995, p. 203).

From this Foucault concludes that power is not exerted simply through subjecting individuals to certain conditions; instead individuals come to accept and internalise the prevailing order as desirable and act in accordance with the prescriptions of dominant discourse (Sarup, 1993). The individual “invests in the tenets of a normalising judgment” and begins to regulate her practices to conform to the norm (Macleod & Durrheim, 2002a, p. 48). This internalised surveillance is enacted through different technologies of the self (Foucault, 1987). For instance, an individual who problematises her sexuality as deviant and seeks counsel or treatment is governing herself, described by Foucault (1982; 1988a) as the self acting on the self. Foucault’s technologies of the self thus entail “a process through which individuals come to construct their subjectivity and understand themselves” (Forbes, 1996, p. 180).

Dean (2010) describes four aspects involved in the analysis of such individual fashioning of identity, as proposed by Foucault. As a first aspect, analysis of self-governance “involves ontology, concerned with *what* we seek to act upon, the *governed or ethical substance*” (Dean, 2010, p. 26, emphasis in original). As a second aspect, “it involves ascetics, concerned with *how* we govern this substance, the *governing or ethical work*” (Dean, 2010, p. 26, emphasis in original). This governing work may entail surveillance and normalisation of subjects who do not conform to the norm. As a third aspect, it includes deontology, “concerned with *who* we are when we are governed in such a manner, our ‘mode of subjectification’, or the *governable or ethical subject*” (Dean, 2010, p. 26, emphasis in original). Here, the analysis is focused on the type of subject one has to be in order to engage with a process of self-governance - for instance, a sexual “deviant”. The fourth aspect involves “a teleology, concerned with *why* we govern or are governed, the ends or goal sought, what we hope to become or the world we hope to create, that which might be called the *telos of governmental or ethical practices*” (Dean, 2010, p. 26, emphasis in original). Governmentality, whether that of the self or of others, is always directed at a supposed goal that should be achieved.

This measure of agency implied in self-governance is of course mediated by the discourses that are “proposed, suggested and imposed” by the social and historical context in which an individual exists (Foucault, 1987, p. 122). Incitements by authoritative persons for subjects to participate in gendered and sexualised self-technologies draw on such dominant discourses and appeal to “normalised assumptions concerning femininity, sexuality and gendered relations” (Macleod & Durrheim, 2002a, p. 49). To this end, the success of incitements to gendered and sexualised self-technologies depends on the extent to which women identify with and invest in such normalising assumptions (Macleod & Durrheim, 2002a).

2.4.2.2 Pastoral power

Foucault (1982) first identifies pastoral power as a form of government exercised in early Christianity under the pastorate of the church, where intimate knowledge of subjects was gained through confessionals and other techniques and used to direct and regulate people. This form of power is not only concerned with the wellbeing of the community as is the case in political power, but instead is focused on each individual and his/her salvation (Foucault, 1982). Later, pastoral power spread and proliferated outside the institution of the church to inform the government of populations by modern states, enacted through techniques and strategies to regulate the health, wealth and wellbeing of their populations (Foucault, 1982). In this manner, pastoral power became desecularised to function as a form of bio-power, which I discuss in the next section. More recent forms of pastoral power are found in disciplines of knowledge such as psychiatry, medicine, economics and sociology that normalise and regulate behaviour from the individual unit of the subject through to populations (West, 1996).

Pastoral power functions in two main ways. Firstly, this individualising power is enacted through the care of a pastor (or a politician or another authoritative individual), where the pastor is regarded as a shepherd responsible for the salvation of his/her flock through “constant, individualised and final kindness” (Foucault, 1988b, p. 62). However, Foucault (1982) observes that “this form of power cannot be exercised without knowing the inside of people’s minds, without exploring their souls, without making them reveal their innermost secrets. It implies a knowledge of the conscience and an ability to direct it” (p. 783). To this end, pastoral power also functions in a second way, in that it encourages a developed form of conscience in the flock where, through techniques of self-examination, they achieve greater knowledge of themselves and strive to implement the lessons from the shepherd. In this manner self-technologies are involved in pastoral power “but are linked to the macro-strategies of government through guidance and care, rather than surveillance and normalising judgement as in disciplinary technology” (Macleod & Durrheim, 2002a, p. 51).

2.4.2.3 Bio-power

Foucault (1976/1990) uses the word bio-power to refer to the diverse ways in which disciplinary power acts on the body. He describes bio-power as “the set of mechanisms through which the basic biological features of the human species became the object of a political strategy, of a general strategy of power” (Foucault, 1978/2009, p. 1). Bio-power is a pervasive form of power “because its logics, technologies, and experts offer, or at least purport to offer, tools for societal *self-government*”; through bio-power, “the welfare state sheds responsibility for its pastorate by shifting

risk and empowerment to its subjects” (Nadesan, 2008, p. 3, emphasis in original).

Foucault distinguishes between two interrelated sites of the exercise of bio-power, connected through intermediary clusters of relations (Foucault, 1976/1990). Firstly, bio-power is described as it relates to a micro-level of the control of the body (Macleod & Durrheim, 2002a). Here bio-power is aimed at creating docile and productive bodies, and is “centered on the body as a machine: its disciplining, the optimisation of its capabilities, the extortion of its forces, the parallel increases of its usefulness and its docility, its integration into systems of efficient and economic controls” (Foucault, 1976/1990, p. 139).

Secondly, bio-power is described as it relates to a macro-level of control of the social body, or the population (Macleod & Durrheim, 2002a). This includes political strategies aimed at controlling populations through regulating domains such as health, reproduction, birth rates, mortality and longevity (Foucault, 1976/1990). It is in this way that the regulation and control of not only individual bodies but also of populations (through, for instance, the regulation of family structures, reproductive practices and sexualities) can be rationalised and justified as part of a political project that ensures healthy and productive populations (Foucault, 1976/1990; 1978/2009).

2.4.2.4 Liberalism

Liberalism appears as a critique of “excessive disciplinary power in the name of the rights and liberty of the individual” (Dean, 2010, p. 133). As a form of government, it positions itself as critical of the regulation and control of populations enacted through bio-power, instead seeking to govern through rationality, autonomy and privacy (Rose, 1992). Liberalism constructs a subject that is afforded rights, is considered unique and is “obliged to be free”, and argues for an exercise of power over citizens that can be legitimated through claims to a rational basis (Rose, 1998, p. 100).

The contention that liberalism rejects disciplinary power is however false and obscures its very dependence on such power (Dean, 2010). Liberalism *appears* to privilege the individual as autonomous and free, but through such individualisation in fact incites the subject’s engagement in self-technologies to labour towards her “true self” (Foucault, 1979/2008). For instance, a liberalist appeal to psychological discourses that posit an inherent sexual identity makes it possible for an individual to “confess” or disclose her bisexual identity to others, to identify within her the barriers to accepting her sexual orientation as different from the norm, and to labour towards achieving a stable, integrated and healthy bisexual identity. In this manner, “the governmental wisdom of

liberalism is derived from the rationality of the governed rather than from the calculation of force or the truth of the human natural or divine orders” (Dean, 2010, p. 64-65).

From the preceding discussion it is apparent that Foucault’s conceptualisation of power entails distinct forms of power that function in interrelated ways to incite subjects to invest in the tenets of dominant discourse. I now turn to the utility of such a conceptualisation of discourse and power for feminist theorists.

2.5 Feminist engagement with poststructuralism

In this section I introduce some discussion of the extensive engagement of feminist theorists with poststructuralism. While the discussion of Derridean and Foucauldian theory thus far has already pointed to the utility of poststructuralist theory for feminist research (e.g., in the cited works of Butler, 1990; Hepburn, 1999a, 1999b; Macleod, 2002; Macleod & Durrheim, 2002a, 2002b), I introduce here a more explicit discussion of the manner in which feminist scholars have engaged with poststructuralist theory. This discussion extends into the subsequent chapter, where I detail Butler’s use of Foucauldian and Derridean theory in her poststructuralist treatment of sex, gender and sexuality, as it informs the current study.

For many theorists the utility of poststructuralist theory for feminist research is clear - a central aim of feminism is to disrupt and subvert oppressive gender systems and poststructuralism seems to support such an aim. However Hepburn (1999a) notes that it is precisely the uncertainty and subversion made possible by deconstructionist work that has been so troubling for modernist³ feminists. In this section I will first review the manner in which feminism initially treated the category “woman” through its assumption of a universal and shared female identity. Thereafter I will discuss the manner in which poststructuralist theory has informed feminist challenges to such an advancement of a singular identity of “woman”. The discussion will illustrate the utility of poststructuralist theory for feminist theorists wanting to challenge the historical construction of gender, “without either simply reversing the old hierarchies or confirming them” (Scott, 1988, p. 33).

Feminists initially cohered around the category “woman” as a shared identity, and subsequently a shared oppression based on gender, from which to resist patriarchal oppression. This treatment of “woman” as a singular identity, typically ascribed to first and second wave feminism, has been

³ Hepburn (1999a) acknowledges that the polarised positioning of modern and postmodern feminists sits uncomfortably with many, but uses the terms for rhetorical clarity.

critiqued for essentialising women's experience and ignoring differences between women (Cranny-Francis, Waring, Stavropoulos, & Kirby, 2003). Feminist resistance to mainstream psychology has mirrored this advancement of a singular identity of "woman" by adhering to the liberal humanist tradition that has dominated in the social sciences (Gavey, 1997). The liberal humanist assumptions that have informed mainstream psychology include, amongst others, an emphasis on experience as privileged. Within this tradition it is experience that provides us with authentic accounts of what we think and feel in any particular situation, and although experience requires language to be communicated to others, liberal humanism regards it as existing prior to language (Weedon, 1987).

Feminist consciousness-raising within psychology (and other social science disciplines) has mirrored the liberal humanist tradition by centring its activities on bringing women together to share their experience. It assumes a unitary female experience where women are considered to share an essential reality based on their female identity (Boonzaier & Shefer, 2006). By providing accounts of women's experience that are assumed to be universal to all women (Gavey, 1997; Weedon, 1987), it relies on a conceptualisation of women's experience as "pure and essential" (Gavey, 1997, p. 51). By supplementing mainstream psychology's androcentric knowledge base with authoritative accounts of women's experience, feminist critiques of mainstream psychology have in effect been framed in the same terms as the movement it is attempting to transform (Gavey, 1997; Hepburn, 1999a). Although these accounts frame women's experience positively, it remains inadequate in deconstructing the hierarchical relationship between men and women as it exists "parallel to hegemonic discourse" (Weedon, 1987, p. 110).

Third wave feminism, in which poststructuralist feminist theory has been influential, has been critical of such essentialist interpretations of gender. Poststructuralism is critical of feminist critiques that present a monolithic conceptualisation of "woman" and that lack awareness that experience can be interpreted in multiple and contradictory ways (Weedon, 1987). It questions the notion of a unitary female experience, as various social signifiers, such as race, sexuality, educational background and class, can influence one's experience (Shefer, 1999). Such lines of difference lead one to question how similar women's experiences are (Shefer, 1999). Instead of assuming a unitary female subject, poststructuralist feminism acknowledges that meaning is varied and is attributed to experience through the language that is used to describe it (Weedon, 1987).

Butler (1990) states that "rather than a stable signifier that commands the assent of those whom it purports to describe and represent, *women*, even in the plural, has become a troublesome term, a

site of contest, a cause for anxiety” (p. 3, emphasis in original). Poststructuralist theorists such as Butler (1990; 1993b) argue for the destabilisation of categories such as gender. Butler’s (1990; 1993b) argument rests on the notion that the continued adoption of categories such as “woman” is politically problematic as these categories are only intelligible within the binaries of masculinity/femininity that feminist politics are attempting to subvert (Butler, 1990). Beasley (2005) differentiates Butler’s approach from other feminist projects by emphasising her insistence on deconstructing categories of identity:

The task is not to enjoin a gender identity like women, which attends to singular *difference* from men, or even to invoke multiple identities like lesbian, black women and ‘Third World’ women, which acknowledge *differences between women*. Moreover, such an approach does not stop at the psychoanalytic focus on *differences within* individuals... Rather, the aim is to disrupt categories *per se*, to disrupt the fixity of identity, by showing up its non-natural incoherence. (p. 102, emphasis in original)

Because gender is always performed in relation to particular historical contexts and intersects with other aspects of socially constituted identities, it can never be separated out to arrive at a universal or cross-cultural identity that all women share (Butler, 1990). For Butler (1990) the insistence of feminist politics to construct a common subject through the category “woman” has resulted in the exclusion of those who do not conform to the unspoken assumptions of the meaning of such a category, and paradoxically undermines the emancipatory aims of feminism. Butler (1990) questions the continued utility of feminist politics that uphold the notion of a singular identity of which the meaning is presupposed:

If the stable notion of gender no longer proves to be the foundational premise of feminist politics, perhaps a new sort of feminist politics is now desirable to contest the very reifications of gender and identity, one that will take the variable construction of identity as both a methodological and normative prerequisite, if not a political goal. (p. 5)

The political aims of feminism can then be best served by a continued insistence on the “undesignatable field of differences” evoked by the term “woman” (Butler, 1995, p. 50). Relinquishing the notion of “woman” as a fixed referent for identity and embracing the continually contested nature of the category, provides the “ungrounded ground” for feminist theory and political action (Butler, 1995, p. 50).

The debate about the political utility of mobilising around the category “woman” has also been taken up by feminist scholars in fields such as Critical Race Theory, where scholars have proposed a useful position by arguing that identities can be employed strategically (Sandoval, 1991). In this manner, a group can mobilise around a common cause without drawing on an essentialist identity as “woman” or “bisexual”. Cranny-Francis et al. (2003), referring to Sandoval’s oppositional politics, state that a category of identity “is not one which is based on some natural biological indicator, such as skin, or sex, or blood, but is rather a group which is united by affinity, by the decision to come together against a common cause” (p. 71). Sandoval (1991) suggests that it is possible to resist reification through cohering around a common political goal instead of an essential identity. Butler (1995) herself has not contested this point, as she acknowledges the political utility for feminists to mobilise around the category “woman” – she states that political activism necessarily relies on some recourse to identity politics in order to advance the feminist project. What can be reiterated, however, is her argument that the category “woman”, when strategically employed, should be continually contested and treated as a “site of permanent openness and resignifiability” instead of being advanced as a singular identity (Butler, 1995, p. 50).

One should then be clear that Butler’s (1995, p. 51) deconstruction of categories does not imply a “political nihilism”, but rather creates opportunities for terms to be freed up to signify different meanings and to be used to achieve different political aims. Butler (1995) states that “to call a presupposition into question is not the same as doing away with it: rather, it is to free it from its metaphysical lodgings in order to occupy and to serve very different political aims” (p. 51). By suspending one’s commitment to the fixed meaning of a term, it becomes possible to explore the manner in which a term is deployed and the political aims such a deployment serves (Hepburn, 1999a). To this end, poststructuralist theory provides strategies and tactics that can be productively employed in support of feminist efforts to disrupt and transform oppressive systems.

2.6 Poststructuralism and the possibilities for feminist resistance

The utility of Foucault’s (1976/1990, 1980) conceptualisation of power for feminist research lies in the fact that it sensitises us to the notion that power does not exist in a simplistic top-down manner, where subordination is described in uncomplicated terms of domination and victimisation (Deveaux, 1994). A theory of power cannot be limited to a description of those in authority that “exert various forms of coercive restraint upon the mass of more or less compliant subjects” (Sarup, 1993, p. 74). By theorising power as diffuse and as operating through multiple power relations, a more nuanced

exploration of how power is exercised through political, social and personal relationships becomes possible (Deveaux, 1994).

However, Deveaux (1994) describes Foucault's conceptualisation of power as a double-edged sword. While Foucault provides a more textured analysis of power that moves away from a dualistic top-down conceptualisation, his view on agency and resistance remains undeveloped (Deveaux, 1994). Critics of Foucault's conceptualisation of power state that according to his view power has no origin, no grounding, and therefore no "locus of opposition" (Sarup, 1993, p. 84). These critiques posit that if power is not centralised or grounded in anything, then resistance becomes impossible; Hartsock (1990) succinctly states that in Foucault's analysis "power is everywhere, and so ultimately nowhere" (p. 170).

Feminist poststructuralist theorists such as Hepburn (1999b), Butler (1995) and Fraser (1995) have responded to this claim by arguing that a foundational grounding of power is not a prerequisite for feminists' political engagement. In their view, advancing a new grounding to replace oppressive normative groundings is simply a case of committing the same violence of exclusion that feminism has worked to resist (Butler, 1995). Hepburn (1999b) goes further to argue that the resistance to assuming a foundational grounding is precisely what enables poststructuralism to be political: "To develop discourses less concerned with developing regimes of truth, more open and careful about their own modalities of writing, is surely a *precondition* for resistance" (p. 652, emphasis in original). Feminist poststructuralism then does not regard a lack of foundational grounding as problematic, instead it regards an anti-foundational stance as one of the strengths of conducting research within such a framework, as it "bring(s) into question any discursive move which attempts to place itself beyond question" (Nicholson, 1995, p. 5).

Feminist poststructuralist theorists have further responded to critiques of Foucault's conceptualisation of power by stating that although discourse exercises power over subjects, it is not a futile project to resist dominant or oppressive discourses (Weedon, 1987). Weedon (1987) argues that Foucault's analysis of power does not deny the possibility of resistance. She roots her response in Foucault's conceptualisation of discourse, arguing that the very existence of a dominant discourse implies the possibility of a reverse discourse emerging (Weedon, 1987). Weedon (1987) cites the example of Foucault's (1976/1990) analysis of the emergence of a discursively constituted subject position of the (male) homosexual in nineteenth century discourse. Foucault (1976/1990) details how various disciplinary practices contributed to the classification of a mode of sexual behaviour,

that is available to anyone, as belonging to (and defining) a particular group of people, i.e. the modern homosexual. At the same time, however, the emergence of this dominant discourse implied the possibility of subversion, of the emergence of a reverse discourse:

There is no question that the appearance in nineteenth-century psychiatry, jurisprudence, and literature of a whole series of discourses on the species and subspecies of homosexuality, inversion, pederasty, and 'psychic hermaphroditism', made possible a strong advance of social controls into this area of 'perversity'; but also made possible the formation of a 'reverse' discourse: homosexuality began to speak in its own behalf, to demand that its legitimacy or 'naturalness' be acknowledged, often in the same vocabulary, using the same categories by which it was medically disqualified. (Foucault, 1976/1990, p. 101)

While Foucault (1976/1990) clearly acknowledges the possibility of resisting oppressive discourse, he does also caution against a view that posits dominant discourses of power as existing in opposition to reverse discourses that run counter to them. Instead of describing discourses as existing in a bipolar manner, Foucault (1976/1990) emphasises the tactical productivity of discourses. Discourses operate as part of a field of force (or power) relations and serve to advance various strategies within such a force relation. Contradictory or opposing discourses can exist in support of the same force relation – discourses are not unambiguous but are instead complex and unstable. In this sense it is more useful to question the tactical and strategic *effects* of discourse, than to simply attempt to identify discourses as dominant or reverse, or as forming part of a "dominant or dominated" global strategy (Foucault, 1976/1990, p. 102). Deconstructing texts through poststructuralist analysis would then focus on altering the internal systems of discourse and challenging the relationships between discourses, thus allowing "different spaces for manoeuvre and resistance" (Parker, 2002, p. 157).

Butler (1990) states that a poststructuralist feminist resistance to oppressive discourses relies on acknowledging the continued variability of all categories of meaning. Poststructuralist feminism states that discourses provide certain subject positions but it also acknowledges that individuals have a degree of agency in terms of which subject positions they take up (Weedon, 1987). Discourses might offer a preferred or more valued subject position but at the same time offer a reversal of that position. Individuals can negotiate, accept or reject the institutionalised versions of gendered or sexualised identity offered in a particular society (Weedon, 1987). A poststructuralist feminist analysis will then consider the manner in which individuals invest in certain subject positions, or resist adopting the dominant prescribed subject position (Weedon, 1987). I elaborate

further on Butler's (1990) theory of subversion in the next chapter, where I discuss her strategies for "troubling" regulative discourses of sex, gender and sexuality.

2.7 Conclusion

By describing the theoretical stance employed in the present study, I am acknowledging that all knowledge is situated. The theoretical approach assumed in this study shapes (and constrains) what kind of research questions can be asked and informs the methods used in addressing these research questions (Willig, 2008). In this chapter I outlined the theoretical position of feminist poststructuralism that informs the present study. I first discussed the context of postmodernism within which poststructuralism developed as a school of thought. I briefly discussed how postmodernism challenged the modernist assumptions of a world existing independently from our observation of it. Instead, postmodern theory argues that reality is socially constructed through discourse (Gergen, 2001). This view also challenges the modernist notion of a unified, rational subject, and instead proposes that the subject is continually constituted and reconstituted through discourse (Weedon, 1987).

It is within this context of postmodern challenges to modernism's grand narratives that poststructuralist theory developed a critique of the production of truths (Namaste, 1994). I discussed some of the tools for analysis provided by poststructuralist theory and argued that feminist researchers can productively employ these tools. Poststructuralist analysis allows for an exploration of the hierarchical binaries that structure gender as well as sexuality and can be employed in support of feminist aims to disrupt the deployment of these binaries in ways that are oppressive (Hepburn, 1999a). The chapter continued with a discussion of a Foucauldian conceptualisation of power as diffuse and as operating through complex systems of social relations (Foucault, 1980). I also discussed the possibilities for resistance within a Foucauldian conceptualisation of discourse.

From the discussion in this chapter it is clear that the conceptualisation of discourse that I draw on in the current study is predominantly informed by Derridean and Foucauldian theory. To conclude this chapter, some shared features of how discourse is conceptualised within such a theoretical stance can be summarised. In this summary, I adapt a framework used by Macleod (2002), who also employs poststructuralist theory in her approach to discourse.

Firstly, discourse can be described as having an underlying regularity (Macleod, 2002). Following Parker's (1992, p. 5) formulation of discourse as a "system of statements which constructs an object", discourses are conceptualised as coherent structures of meaning. This regularity is evident in how the statements in a discourse cluster around "culturally available understandings as to what constitutes a topic" (Parker, 2002, p. 146). Discourses are not static, discrete structures – discourses are historically situated and change over time (Foucault, 1976/1990; Parker, 2002). However, within the poststructuralist conceptualisation employed in the current study, discourses have regularity and can be identified as "socially organised frameworks of meaning" (Burman, 1994a, p. 2). A conceptualisation of discourses as implying an underlying regularity can be criticised as risking reification of discourses. However, there is a measure of utility in regarding discourses as coherent systems of meaning, in order for us to differentiate between discourses (Parker, 1992). By being able to identify discourses, we are provided "frameworks for debating the value of one way of talking about reality over other ways" (Parker, 2002, p. 145).

A second feature of discourse is that it is constructive - discourses are not simply descriptive but instead construct objects and subjects in particular ways (Parker, 1992). Discourses enable certain ways of construing reality – the systems of meanings that circulate at any given time in history construct particular categories of objects and subjects (Parker, 2002). Following this conceptualisation, discourses are also restrictive - discourses enable but also constrain certain understandings of the world and of ourselves (Parker, 1992). This enabling and restriction of meaning implies that discourse exists within relations of power (Foucault, 1976/1990). Discourse regulates subjectivity through processes of normalisation and control and in this manner discourse is tied up with relations of power in that it "transmits and produces power" (Foucault, 1976/1990, p. 100).

Macleod (2002) notes that the duality of discourse as both productive and constraining is also evident in Derridean theory. Meaning is always created in relation to other meanings. Any term derives its meaning not only from the presence of the dominant term but also from the absence of the subordinated term (Derrida, 1976). Meaning is therefore constituted through a constant play on presence and absence since dominant constructions of meaning rely not only on what is said but also on what is *not* said (Derrida, 1976). Similar to this Derridean conceptualisation, a Foucauldian view considers opposing discourses as supporting dominant discourse in that dominant discourse derives its meaning from that which it is not (Foucault, 1976/1990). Such a conceptualisation of discourse has political utility, in that "while discourse excludes subordinate or contradictory

discourses, it simultaneously refers to them, creating the conditions for modification, for the undermining of its presence” (Macleod, 2002, p. 18).

A third feature of discourse that can be emphasised is that discourse has implications for agency. Towards the end of this chapter I noted that Foucault has been criticised for theorising a subject without agency, where the subject exists with “no intrinsic meaning or agency that might be identified, accounted for, or repressed”, aside from its historical constitution through discourse (Dean, 1995, p. 146). Feminist poststructuralist theorists such as Butler (1990) and Weedon (1987) have responded to such criticism by emphasising that Foucault’s (1976/1990) conceptualisation of discourse necessarily implies the possibility of counter-discourses. The approach employed in this study then follows Butler’s (1995) view that resistance is possible and individuals can reinscribe dominant discursive formulations in ways that resist oppression. Discourse constructs subjectivity through the provision of subject positions but individuals do have a measure of agency in the subject positions they adopt and dominant discourses can be challenged.

In the next chapter I review how sex, genders and sexualities have been constructed over time, focussing in particular on constructions of female sexuality.

CHAPTER 3

SEX, GENDERS AND SEXUALITIES

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter I review key moments in the debates around theorising gendered and sexualised subjectivity. I first consider how sex, gender and sexuality have historically been constructed in social science research broadly, and in the discipline of psychology specifically. I then provide a review of feminist poststructuralist responses to these constructions, with a specific focus on Butler's (1990) formulation of identity construction as it relates to the discursive production of gendered and sexualised identities, in order to extend the discussion of poststructuralist theory that was introduced in the previous chapter. Foucauldian theory, although widely taken up in gender studies, has been critiqued for not including an overt gendered focus (Ramazanoglu, 1993). Butler's work, while largely aligned with a Foucauldian and Derridean position, diverges from Foucault's work in that she contributes an explicit focus on the discursive production of not only sexuality but also gendered identities. I conclude this chapter with a review of how female sexuality has been constructed over time, before offering a working understanding of gendered, sexualised subjectivity that can inform the present study.

3.2 Essentialist treatment of sex, gender and sexuality

In this section I consider theories of sex, gender and sexuality as inherent essences, drawn on to posit different sexual "types". I also consider social constructionist challenges to such essentialist treatment.

3.2.1 Sex, gender and the biological imperative

The dominant discourse shaping most social science research on sex and gender has been that biological sex, referring to one's identification as either male or female, is a naturally existing fact that is evident at birth. Gender, on the other hand, is considered to be an acquired identity that depends on social and cultural influences (West & Zimmerman, 1992). In this sex/gender division, sex is typically presented as a biological certainty, as innate and invariable, whereas gender is described as an achieved status that is constructed through social means (West & Zimmerman, 1992).

This sex/gender division has also been upheld in feminist discourse. Starting with Simone de Beauvoir's (1949/1988, p. 295) statement that "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman", the

social character of gender has been emphasised as distinct from but related to biological sex. This idea was further developed by theorising sex as biological femaleness and maleness, and gender as socially and culturally informed (Oakley, 1972). By reiterating the distinction between sex as biologically determined and gender as socially constructed, feminist theorists have been able to question patriarchal assumptions of biological differences between men and women (Weeks, 1985). They have been able to explore the meanings of femininity and masculinity as it varied over time and context, and have been able to illustrate that, since gender is variable, these meanings can be contested and changed (Jackson & Scott, 2002).

However feminist theorists such as Oakley (1972) have been criticised for not entirely escaping the deterministic conceptualisation of gender. In the sex/gender division, biological sex is treated as a pre-existing given and gender as socially constructed, yet gender is theorised as following from sex and is in that sense similarly fixed (Jackson & Scott, 2002). Within feminist theory, several currents of thought have developed that call such an uncritical treatment of sex into question. Stanley (1984) was one of the first feminist theorists to critique this widely held distinction between sex and gender, arguing that biological sex cannot be accepted as unproblematic. Although many feminist theorists reject biological essentialism in favour of social constructionist arguments, Stanley (1984) points out that by accepting the immutability of sex, such theorists still adhere to a view of gender being a product of biological factors. Stanley (1984) argues that such a view leaves sex untheorised and calls for feminist scholars to theorise biological sex from a social constructionist point of view.

West and Zimmerman (1992) also critique the sex/gender division by questioning the view that sex is a natural given onto which gender is built. They note that if one is born female it is assumed that one will achieve a (stable, unvarying) feminine gendered identity. In this sense the sex/gender division, despite its insistence on the fluidity of gender, maintains a deterministic view where sexed males become gendered males, and sexed females become gendered females (West & Zimmerman, 1992). West and Zimmerman (1992) instead argue that sex is socially constructed, similar to gender. The identification of sex as either male or female (because variations in between are widely rejected) occurs through the application of socially agreed-upon biological criteria for classifying an individual's sex – the process of identifying sex as male or female is therefore a social process. This is further illustrated through the example of ambiguous sex at birth, where the “problem” of ambiguous sex is resolved through medical intervention to construct either a male or female body; in that way a disruption of the naturalised binary is avoided (Cranny-Francis et al., 2003).

3.2.2 Fixing sexuality: The creation of sexual “types”

The preceding section briefly reviewed dominant discourses around biological sex and gender. The following discussion is concerned with the manner in which sexuality has historically been constructed in social science. Sexuality, as it refers to sexual object choice and the structure and expression of sexual desire (Cranny-Francis et al., 2003), has been described in varying ways since it emerged as a field of study in the latter part of the nineteenth century. Theories of sexuality have predominantly been grounded in an essentialist view, moving from a conceptualisation of sexuality as the expression of innate biological drives, to a view of sexuality as identity (i.e. categories of sexual orientation). Psychology as a discipline has been particularly influenced by an essentialist ontological and epistemological approach when theorising about sexuality and sexual orientation. The dominant assumption in psychology was at first to emphasise the biological and intrapsychic determinants of sexuality, in line with Freud’s (1905/1953) libido theory. Subsequent approaches followed an identity model, theorising sexual orientation as an inherent, primary component of identity (Bohan & Russell, 1999b), largely shaped by cultural instead of biological and internal forces but still deemed similarly fixed (Stein, 1989).

In this manner, the same deterministic construction of sex/gender as rooted in biology, discussed in the previous section, has also had widespread and enduring implications for how sexuality has been constructed in social science research. The conceptualisation of sexuality as an inherent essence that resides in individuals that has characterised most thinking around sexuality and sexual orientation can be described as the view that sexuality is an intrinsic property of a person that is independent of social or historical context (Rubin, 1984; Stein, 1992; Weeks, 1987). This view supports a realist ontology, in that the categories that are used to describe reality are considered to refer to actual phenomena that exist independently from our understandings thereof (Bohan & Russel, 1999b; Epstein, 1998).

Essentialism further regards sexuality to be stable with the implication that one’s sexual orientation is seen as fixed and unvarying across contexts or one’s lifespan (Beasley, 2005). It draws on a discourse of biology for support, in that sexuality is viewed as “a biological, unchanging force, given at birth” (Stein, 1989, p. 2). Tiefer (1992) notes that biology has remained in a privileged position in sexuality discourse due to the belief that the body provides access to “true” knowledge about sexuality; “the body comes before everything else; it is the original source of action, experience, knowledge, and meaning for the species and the individual” (p. 312). Much of modern discourse around sexuality reflects this preference for biological explanations, with a strong focus on the study

of sexual instinct as an inherent and natural drive (Weeks, 1987). This drive approach to sexuality, extended later by Freud's theory, is described as finding "normal" expression in heterosexual sex, with a prolific number of "deviations" from normal sexual practice being recorded by sexologists in the late nineteenth century (such as Ellis, 1913; Krafft-Ebing, 1931).

These deviations from what was considered normal sexuality were described in great detail in taxonomies of human sexual behaviour, with descriptions of exhibitionism, sado-masochism, zoophilia, fetishism and many more (Krafft-Ebing, 1931). However, the social concerns that gained prominence during the late nineteenth century resulted in proscriptions against homosexuality in particular, being favoured as a matter of public importance (Weeks, 1981). In this period a discourse on the sanctity of marriage and reproductive (hetero)sexual intercourse was increasingly advanced, resulting in greater control of discourses on extra-marital sex. Such control demanded ever-increasing refinement of other sexualities that threatened the discreet and socially sanctioned role of sex in the marital relationship and of all the various taxonomies or deviations, homosexuality was subjected to the most extensive and consistent social pressure (Weeks, 1981).

Within this context, sexuality came to be treated as a "type" or a category of identity, such as "homosexual" or "heterosexual" (Hicks, 2008). In this view, people are considered as having certain indisputable characteristics (hormonal, genetic, psychological and so forth) that identify them as belonging to the "corresponding" category (Epstein, 1998; Stein, 1992). Weeks (1987) describes this as the belief that by describing our sexuality or sexual orientation, we are relating something about our "true essence of being, our real selves" (p. 31).

Essentialist views of sexuality as different types of identity typically came to support a view that reduces sexual orientation to a binary construction, with heterosexuality and homosexuality being regarded as the only valid categories for sexual identification (Bradford, 2004). These two sexual types are regarded as independent and mutually exclusive (Stein, 1992). This dichotomy is structured hierarchically, with heterosexuality often being considered normative and homosexuality being marginalised through depictions of pathology and deviance (Bradford, 2004). It can be noted again that a biologicistic discourse is incited to support this dichotomy resulting in a distinction being drawn between "the apparently Nature-endowed correctness of heterosexual genital intercourse" and "the bizarre manifestations of 'the perverse'" evident in homosexuality (Weeks, 1987, p. 14). Relevant to the current study, it can be emphasised that such a heterosexual/homosexual binary has the consequence of rendering bisexuality largely invisible in theorising sexual orientation.

A competing view that emerged alongside the heterosexual/homosexual binary within essentialist discourse on sexuality was that of a bipolar construction of sexual orientation⁴. The bipolar approach emerged as a result of amongst others, the work of Kinsey (Kinsey, Pomeroy, & Martin, 1948; Kinsey, Pomeroy, Martin, & Gebhard, 1953) who challenged the restriction placed on sexual expression by reducing sexual orientation to a heterosexual/homosexual binary. Instead, a bipolar view of sexual orientation regards sexual orientation as existing somewhere along a one-dimensional continuum of exclusive heterosexuality on the one end of the continuum, and exclusive homosexuality on the other (Stein, 1992). Based on the scale developed by Kinsey et al. (1948, 1953), individuals are placed at a point along the continuum in response to questions about their sexual practices, fantasies and desires. This conceptualisation acknowledges bisexuality by placing individuals indicating “equal” heterosexuality and homosexuality as existing in the middle of this continuum. The Kinsey scale is further elaborated in more detail in Chapter 4.

In recent years the dominant approach to theorising sexuality has been challenged by authors critiquing the assumptions of essentialism (Bohan & Russell, 1999b). In these critiques the binary view of sexual orientation is considered simplistic, in that it reduces a vast array of expressions of sexuality to two categories (Bohan & Russell, 1999c). It is also critiqued as ignorant of the fact that for many people, their understanding of their sexual orientation changes over time (Bohan & Russell, 1999c). Furthermore, by insisting on grouping people according to what is considered to be internally homogenous categories, the varied experiences of people who qualify as belonging to a category are dismissed. The bipolar view of sexuality can be similarly critiqued, particularly as it still conceptualises sexuality in relation to heterosexuality and homosexuality, albeit in a manner that allows for greater flexibility.

The points of criticism raised here are taken up in the next section, which considers social constructionist challenges to essentialist views of sexuality.

3.2.3 Sexuality or sexualities? Early social constructionist critiques

Social constructionist critiques of essentialist theorising of sexuality emerged from various disciplines, initially most notably from sociology (e.g. Richardson, 1987; Weeks, 1981; 1985) and

⁴ Stein (1992), however, argues against the belief that essentialist theories of sexuality typically assume a binary or a bipolar position, citing essentialist research that rely on two-dimensional views of sexuality in support of this.

anthropology (e.g. Rubin, 1975). The work of sociologists Gagnon and Simon (1973) as well as the labelling perspective employed by Plummer (1975) and McIntosh (1968), served to deconstruct essentialist notions of sexuality as natural. McIntosh (1968), in her analysis of the emergence of the homosexual role, illustrates how homosexual identity is in fact a sociohistoric product and not an essential characteristic of individuals. Her work describes how homosexual acts or practices have been documented at various points throughout history, but that it has only been during recent times that the category homosexual was identified as a social role with identifiable characteristics. Gagnon and Simon (1973) extended this critique in the theoretical context of symbolic interactionism, detailing how sexuality is not a naturally present force, but is instead learned through the development of sexual scripts. Their work contributed to the growing theoretical view that sexuality is fluid and negotiated in social contexts. Rubin (1975), in her formulation of sex/gender systems, highlighted the cultural variability of sexuality in the following manner:

The needs of sexuality and procreation must be satisfied as much as the need to eat, and one of the most obvious deductions which can be made from the data of anthropology is that these needs are hardly ever satisfied in any 'natural' form, any more than are the needs for food. Hunger is hunger, but what counts as food is culturally determined and obtained.... Sex is sex, but what counts as sex is equally culturally determined and obtained. (p. 165)

During the 1970's these critiques gained momentum and an identifiable social constructionist approach to studying sexualities emerged (Vance, 1998). While social construction theory as it stands today is not a unitary approach, a number of commonalities in social constructionist theorising of sexuality can be identified. Firstly, transhistorical and transcultural conceptualisations of sexuality are rejected in favour of a view that appreciates that understandings of sexuality are historically and culturally informed (Vance, 1998). Secondly, sexual acts are not considered to have any essential or universal meaning; instead the significance and meaning of sexual and affective experiences are influenced by the cultural and historical context in which they occur (Vance, 1998). Designating an act as sexual is in itself contested, as the meaning of what is considered to be sexual is also subjectively constructed (Epstein, 1998). Individuals and societies develop meanings for certain acts, and over time particular acts become constructed as sexual. This is a direct challenge to popular essentialist conceptualisations of sexuality that consider sexual acts as an expression of an inherent sexual drive, or instinctual force. Instead of reflecting inherent physiological or psychological phenomena, the meanings of sexual acts are considered to be variable and socially negotiated (Epstein, 1998).

Following from this, the relationship between sexual acts and identity is not regarded as fixed, and can be attributed varying and complex meanings depending on the discourses available in a particular society. For example, same-sex behaviour does not necessarily imply a subjective gay or lesbian identity or a commitment to belonging to a gay or lesbian community (Vance, 1998). Social constructionist thought is then critical of essentialist constructions that regard sexuality as a type, where “‘doing’ and ‘experiencing’ can become consolidated into ‘being’ through categoric labelling” (Plummer, 1998, p. 85). Thirdly, sexual orientation, or “the direction of sexual desire”, is also not an inherent essential characteristic of individuals but is instead socially constructed (Vance, 1998, p. 163). Within a social constructionist view, sexual orientation is only relevant as a category to the extent that a society constructs it as being meaningful. Not all societies consider sexual orientation as contributing to one’s identity, and in some societies the construct “sexual orientation” does not even occur (Bohan & Russell, 1999a).

It can be noted that despite a focus on fluidity in sexual orientations, social constructionism has for the most part not addressed bisexuality in theorising sexuality (Stein, 1992). Throughout the period of vigorous challenges to essentialist theorising of sexuality that is reviewed here, the debate is predominantly framed through references to heterosexuality and homosexuality, with little or no reference to bisexuality. Stein (1992) states that in his own review of texts detailing the development of social constructionist arguments challenging essentialist theorising of sexuality, most texts have no entry for “bisexual” or “bisexuality” in their indexes, with several entries existing for homosexuality. This invisibility is also reflected in queer theory’s treatment of bisexuality. Queer theory, as a theoretical position that resists heteronormativity, is widely considered as more radical than social constructionist theory and aims to be an inclusive theory that remains sensitive to differences in sexualities (Seidman, 1996). Namaste (1994) notes that many prominent theorists in queer theory also neglect bisexuality in their treatment of what is considered queer. For example, authors such as De Lauretis (1991) and Sedgwick (1990) use the term queer but only refer to gay men and lesbian women in their discussions. It can then be seen that even in theoretical positions that radically challenge essentialist notions of sexuality, a heterosexual/homosexual binary remains dominant and serves to marginalise bisexuality in theoretical debates.

3.3 Deconstructing sex, gender and sexuality

Poststructuralist theorists such as Butler (1990) extended social constructionist critiques by providing accounts that thoroughly deconstruct sex, gender and sexuality. In the following sections I outline Butler’s deconstructive analysis and gender-as-performative thesis. I also discuss her theory

of subversion as it relates to troubling dominant discourses of sex, gender and sexuality. Throughout the discussion I illustrate how Butler draws on Foucauldian and Derridean theory in developing an account of the discursive production of sex, gender and sexuality.

3.3.1 Butler's deconstructive critique

Butler (1990) critiques the notion that sex provides a stable surface onto which gender can be constructed by arguing that sex is always already gendered. The sex/gender division formulated by feminist theorists such as Oakley (1972) posits sex as pre-discursive, as a natural given, and therefore secure in its internal stability (Butler, 1990). However, Butler's (1990) deconstructive analysis illustrates that sex and bodies are very much cultural products. She argues that the separation of biological sex and culturally informed gender in feminist thought implies that gender does not necessarily follow from sex. The sex/gender distinction construes gender as dependent on cultural meanings that vary across time and contexts; gender therefore cannot be assumed to be the "causal result of sex nor as seemingly fixed as sex" (Butler, 1990, p. 6). If that is the case, then the male/female binary is also called into question, as gender is variable and not limited to these two categories (Butler, 1990).

Following from this, Butler (1990) argues that sex itself is also not an immutable category. She states that bodily sex is only intelligible within the male/female binary of gender, and in that sense it is gender that provides sex with meaning. Butler (1990) argues that without the meanings attached to gender, sex and bodies would not be assigned such significance. In her analysis the body is considered as a "gendered performance which is socially constituted as the essence of gender" (Beasley, 2005, p. 101). Put differently, "bodies become gendered through the continual performance of gender" (Jackson & Scott, 2002, p. 19). Gender is therefore not an essential aspect of identity; it is instead a performance of socially constituted masculinity or femininity (Butler, 1990).

Butler's (1990) deconstructive critique has implications not only for how sex and gender are theorised, but also for theorising sexuality. Through her critique Butler (1990) reintroduces the link between gender and sexuality, which previous feminist theorists severed in their sex/gender formulation. Her account describes how sex, gender and sexuality function together to produce normatively gendered and sexualised subjects. According to Butler (1990), "naturalised heterosexuality requires and regulates gender as a binary relation in which the masculine term is differentiated from a feminine term, and this differentiation is accomplished through the practices of heterosexual desire" (p. 30). I elaborate more on Butler's (1990) theorisation of naturalised

heterosexuality, as proposed in her concept of the heterosexual matrix, in subsequent sections. The discussion now first turns to Butler's (1990) theory of performativity.

3.3.2 Butler's gender-as-performative thesis

Butler's (1990) deconstructive critique of gender points to the artificiality of naturalised categories of identity. The constructive aspect of her work is offered in her thesis of gender-as-performative (Bordo, 1992). Butler posits that our identities, gendered and otherwise, have no internal "core"; instead it is brought into being through the practices that construct it (Bordo, 1992). Butler (1990) theorises the performativity of gender as "the repeated stylisation of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being" (p. 33). She emphasises that it is only an *appearance* of substance and gender has no essence or "realness"; it is a fiction. The powerful appeal of gender as a stable, seamless identity lies in its repetitive performance over time, to create the illusion of a coherent category (Butler, 1990). The performativity of gender relies on citing past practices, conventions and norms of what it means to be male or female (Butler, 1993a). These citational practices - "bodily gestures, movements and enactments of various kinds" - work together to achieve what is regarded as an appropriate gendered identity (Butler, 1988, p. 519).

In describing gender as performative, Butler (1990) draws on Austin's speech act theory, as well as Derrida's deconstruction of Austin's work. Austin (1976) uses the term "performative" to describe linguistic utterances that perform actions, in that they "'do' as well as 'say'" (Pilgrim, 2001, p. 88). Austin (1979) argues that statements such as an apology or waging a bet are not simply descriptive reports of an action; instead such statements are actions in themselves. Butler (1990) extends Austin's notion of performativity to provide an analysis of how gender is constituted through discourse. Butler's thesis advances an understanding of gender as the recurring citation of practices, resulting in an "an illusion sustained by the incessant replication of norms that materialise that which they govern" (Hey, 2006, p. 440). Hey (2006) explains by use of an example of another type of illusion - animation - describing how cartoon characters "come to life as the trick effect of animation. They are 'dead' images brought to life by graphic iterations, a device allowing for microscopic alterations that simultaneously evince the continuous reality of a coherent but moving image seen on screen" (p. 440). Through the repetition of citational practices denoting "appropriate" gender, the illusion of gender comes to be regarded as fixed, natural and as always already existing. An important implication of Butler's theorisation of gender is that identity becomes a performative accomplishment and therefore moves from a "substantial model of identity to one that requires a

conception of a constituted *social temporality*” (Butler, 1988, p. 520, emphasis in original).

In the next section I turn to Butler’s (1990; 1993a) view of the constraints that regulative discourses place on the performance of gender.

3.3.3 Performativity and regulative discourses

Drawing on Foucault’s notion of the restrictive effects of discourse, Butler (1990) argues that identity categories, such as gender and sexuality, are constrained by the discursive resources available to the subject. Butler’s gender-as-performative thesis posits that identity categories are curtailed by the discursive frame in which they are enacted; identity “scripts” are “always already determined within this regulatory frame, and the subject has a limited number of ‘costumes’ from which to make a constrained choice of gender style” (Salih, 2007, p. 56). The enactment of norms regarding what is considered an appropriate or viable identity corresponds with cultural discourses that constitute and regulate the ideal (Butler, 1990). This has the implication that individuals are not able to take on any identity of their choosing since Butler (1999) emphasises that “to enter into the repetitive practices of this terrain of signification is not a choice” (p. 189). She continues that “there is no possibility of agency or reality outside of the discursive practices that give those terms the intelligibility that they have” (Butler, 1999, p. 189). Discourse, in making available certain discursive resources, also pose constraints on what is intelligible and possible.

Butler, borrowing from Foucault, refers to this productive influence of systems of cultural intelligibility as “regulatory ideals” (Butler, 1993a, p. 22) or “disciplinary regimes” (Butler, 1999, p. 171). These demarcate what is considered a coherent, natural, viable identity. They mark off “what can and cannot be thought within the terms of cultural intelligibility” (Butler, 1999, p. 100). One such regulative discourse, emphasised by Butler (1990) in her gender-as-performativity thesis, is that of the heterosexual matrix. She describes the heterosexual matrix as the “culturally intelligible grids of an idealised and compulsory heterosexuality” against and through which identity is constructed (Butler, 1999, p. 172).

Butler further draws on a Foucauldian notion of power/knowledge when she describes regulative discourses as operating through disciplinary techniques. Individuals are continuously compelled to “cite’ the norm in order to qualify and remain a viable subject” (Butler, 1993a, p. 232). For instance, Bartky (1988), in her analysis of the construction of female identities, describes how the disciplinary practices that constitute femininity work towards creating an ideal femininity. These practices, such

as exhibiting an appropriate feminine posture or making use of the correct beauty technologies, construct a “practiced and subjected” body (Bartky, 1988, p. 100). Women who are unwilling or unable to enact such an appropriately embodied femininity face disciplinary techniques, such as the sense of deficiency and shame that is associated with women’s bodies that do not conform to social norms (Bartky, 1988). In this manner categories of identity, such as male or female, are “not the product of a choice, but the forcible citation of a norm, one whose complex historicity is indissociable from relations of discipline, regulation [and] punishment” (Butler, 1993a, p. 232).

Regulative discourses then compel individuals to perform their gender in agreement with dominant norms, or risk being designated as unintelligible and unviable subjects. However, while this demonstrates the constraining effects of discourse, it can be emphasised that the manner in which discourse and power are inextricably linked, also point to the possibility of resistance. As intimated in the previous chapter, Butler (1999) refers to the potential for subversive acts to disrupt regulative discourses:

When the disorganisation and disaggregation of the field of bodies disrupt the regulatory fiction of heterosexual coherence, it seems that the expressive model loses its descriptive force. That regulatory ideal is then exposed as a norm and a fiction that disguises itself as a developmental law regulating the sexual field that it purports to describe. (p. 713)

In the following section I discuss Butler’s theory of subversion, particularly as proposed in her notion of citational politics.

3.3.4 Butler’s citational politics

The preceding discussion points to one of the main criticisms of Butler’s conceptualisation of the subject. By locating the subject in a set of regulative discourses that constitute identity, Butler has been critiqued as denying agency (Deveaux, 1994; Hartsock, 1990). I discussed Butler’s response to such criticism, also as it relates to a Foucauldian conception of discourse as coercive, in Chapter 2. Here I take this debate up again, specifically as it relates to Butler’s account of sex, gender and sexuality.

Butler (1993a) uses the Derridean notion of citation as part of her performativity thesis – she refers to citations as re-iterative practices that constitute that which it describes. Citations are discursive actions that are repeatedly deployed to produce a copy of the original or the ideal (Butler, 1993a). These repetitions of the norms that constitute the ideal are continually re-cited to achieve a viable

identity; however, there is no primary source or authority that constitutes the original (Butler, 1993a). The original does not exist since the “citation of the law is the very mechanism of its production and articulation” (Butler, 1993a, p. 15). In Butlerian theory the “ideal that is mirrored depends on that very mirroring to be sustained as an ideal” (Butler, 1993a, p. 14). Consequently, Butler (1990) argues that gender, and other categories of identity, are always a copy of a copy, or an “imitation without an original” (p. 175).

While Butler’s thesis has the implication that gender is false, in that it only has the appearance of substance, certain gender performatives are privileged as authentic. This is particularly the case for gender performatives that support the continuity and correspondence between sex, gender and sexuality, such as heteronormative masculinity and femininity. Butler (1993a) states that performatives that hold particular authority, that are successful in their citation of gender, do so because they “*accumulate the force of authority through the repetition or citation of a prior, authoritative set of practices*” (p. 227, emphasis in original). Such authoritative performatives obscure their constructed character through appeals to naturalness; they appear to correspond to a “natural” prior original. Butler (1993a) however emphasises that the success of authoritative performatives is only provisional, since the necessity of their repetition exposes them as fictions.

Butler’s theory of subversion draws on the potential for certain practices to trouble authoritative performatives and in that way show up their constructed character. She argues that it is possible for “marginal practices and identities that exploit the paradoxical ‘constitutive outside’ of the hegemonic norm”, to disrupt the naturalness of the norm and produce alternatives to monolithic forms of power (Boucher, 2006, p. 117). Subversive practices take advantage of the supplementary character of dominant terms, where marginal identities (such as homosexuality and bisexuality) function as the “constitutive outside” of the heteronorm (Boucher, 2006, p. 117). Such marginalised or delegitimised identities are “the abject” Other in that they constitute the boundaries of the norm (Butler, 1990). They trouble the authority of the heteronorm precisely because of the impossibility of normative identities to fully assert an identity that is not reliant on *both* reiteration *and* exclusion – normative identities are dependent on the marginal identities that they exclude (Butler, 1997).

One such example of troubling, offered by Butler (1990), is the notion of parody-as-subversion. As discussed, Butler’s (1990) theory of subversion entails appropriating and re-citing discursive acts in different contexts, thereby allowing for resignification of the performative utterances. Considering

the performative character of all gender, it is possible to enact gender in such a way that the constructedness of authoritative identities becomes apparent. In using drag as an example of parody-as-subversion, Butler (1990) argues that “*in imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself*” (p. 175, emphasis in original). She continues, “in the place of the law of heterosexual coherence, we see sex and gender denaturalised by means of a performance which avows their distinctness and dramatizes the cultural mechanism of their fabricated unity” (Butler, 1990, p. 175). Drag then has the potential to show up the parodic mimicry of all gender, where there is no original that can be copied (Butler, 1990).

It is possible that bisexuality has the same transgressive potential to trouble heterosexual coherence. To this end, McAvan (2007) notes that bisexuality “problematizes the sex/gender/desire matrix, for though it will at times be necessarily ‘opposite’ sex related, it makes the once-and-forever nature of heterosexual identity impossible” (¶15). McAvan (2007) continues to state, “where the heterosexual act is often thought to confirm identity forever, by its nature bisexuality does not and *cannot* effect such a confirmation” (¶15, emphasis in original). In this sense, Butler’s theory of subversion provides the possibility that marginal identities, such as bisexuality, can potentially trouble the taken for granted naturalness of the heteronorm.

3.3.5 Distinguishing between performance and performativity

From the discussion thus far it becomes apparent that two main points of critique can be levelled at Butler’s (1990) thesis of gender-as-performative. Firstly, her work has been described as positing a subject without agency (a point I have discussed in Chapter 2 and also in the current chapter). Secondly, and to some extent in contradistinction to the first point, her notion of performativity has been interpreted by some critics as positing a volitional subject that actively and deliberately “performs” gender (Pilgrim, 2001). These two areas of critique have resulted in Butler (1993a; 1999) clarifying the distinction between “performativity” and “performance”. While Butler (1999) has described the two terms as related, she has also emphasised certain differences between the terms. Butler (1993a) notes that she uses performativity in a linguistic and sociological sense, not a dramaturgical one. As described earlier, she bases her gender-as-performativity thesis on Austin’s conceptualisation of utterances as performing certain actions, not as indicative of a role that is taken on or acted out. Pilgrim (2001) notes that Austin’s intention with the term performative was clear: “Austin specifically states that the term ‘performative’ is drawn from ‘perform (an action)’, making no mention of the other meaning ‘perform (a part or character)’” (p. 88).

In distinguishing between these two terms, Butler (1993a) describes performativity “not as the act by which a subject brings into being what she/he names, but, rather, as that reiterative power of discourse to produce the phenomena that it regulates and constrains” (p. 2). It is performativity that informs the focus of Butler’s (1990; 1993a) work and she has distanced herself from an understanding of gender as performance. While she argues that performativity will always include performance, in that gender is “both intentional and performative” (Butler, 1988, p. 521-522), she maintains that her work proposes the former as an analytical tool (Butler, 1993a). Consequently, the notion of performance remains underdeveloped in Butler’s own work but has been taken up by other scholars who have argued for the utility of further developing this discarded notion (e.g., Brickell, 2005). Morison (2011), for example, uses both a performative *and* performance focus in her analysis of discourse, attending not only to the influence of wider discursive contexts but also to the processes that are involved in a more conscious and immediate enactment of identity.

In the current study my analytical focus weighs more heavily towards notions of performativity, or what can be described as the macro-context of discourse. However, considering the interrelated nature of the two terms, there are instances in which my focus is also informed by the immediate context of discourse, in that I attend to how participants construct meaning in relation to the interview context and myself as the interviewer. My focus in conducting the analysis is described in more detail in Chapter 5 where I provide an overview of the research process.

What can be emphasised at this point in the discussion is that poststructuralist feminists such as Butler denounce the essentialist stance of earlier theorising of sex, gender and sexuality, and assume a radical social constructionist view of these constructs.

3.4. Theories of sexualities in the context of political activism

Having reviewed theories of sex, gender and sexuality, I now consider the implications of such theories for activism centred on sexual rights. Interestingly, the growing call to consider sexualities as socially constructed and fluid was not echoed by activists invested in bringing about social change and securing minority rights for individuals resisting heterosexuality. Since the 1970’s, when a social constructionist approach to sexuality gained momentum, the essentialist treatment of homosexuality that previously dominated among clinicians and social scientists, has been extended and further reified by gay and lesbian communities themselves (Plummer, 1998).

Epstein (1998) provides an overview of the development of (mostly male) gay political activism and how it relates to the essentialist/social constructionist debates in theorising sexuality. He notes that gay liberation politics initially challenged the view that homosexuality should be “tolerated” with a “left-Freudian view of human sexuality as ‘polymorphously perverse’” (Epstein, 1998, p. 138). Activists called for the deconstruction of categories such as homosexual or heterosexual and positioned themselves as the sexual liberators of society. Epstein (1998) cites activist Carl Wittman, who despite being committed to a gay identity, supported the notion of a universal bisexual nature:

The reason so few of us are bisexual is because society made such a big stink about homosexuality that we got forced into seeing ourselves as either straight or nonstraight... We’ll be gay until everyone has forgotten that it’s an issue. Then we’ll begin to be complete people. (Wittman, 1969/2004, p. 29)

Wittman’s (1969/2004) statement was a rare reference to gay activism embracing bisexual potential, a sentiment that was short-lived. The openness and support for fluidity in sexual identities found in pockets of the early gay liberation movement later evolved in relation to changes in social conditions. By the 1970’s a new generation of gay activists was rallying for recognition and equal rights by strategically appealing to essentialist notions of homosexual identity. In North America, this strategy echoed a discourse of minority rights that had gained political support (Epstein, 1998). A similar strategy proved successful in South Africa. The arguments drawn on by activists equated discrimination based on sexual orientation to that of other key political concerns, such as eradicating racism and gender-based discrimination. Sexual orientation was communicated as an immutable identity that all people had, instead of focusing on fluid sexual practices or variations in identities (Thoreson, 2008). The successes achieved by lesbian and gay activists internationally and in South Africa were then partly due to the manner in which such groups strategically deployed essentialist discourses of sexual orientation, instead of using references to the fluidity of sexuality (Epstein, 1998; Thoreson, 2008).

It can then be said that to the extent that social constructionist theory has evolved in its theorisation of sexuality as fluid and socially negotiated, a tension has developed between theory and practice (Vance, 1998). On the one hand, theorists have been attempting to deconstruct the sexual hierarchy that prescribes essentialist categories of sexuality and privileges heterosexuality. On the other, gay and lesbian activists have been increasingly seeking legitimation through calling on essentialist categories of sexual identity. These attempts to assume a collective identity (typically gay or lesbian) and mobilise in support of equal rights, has had the problematic consequence of serving to reify the

exact sexual hierarchy that such groups are trying to subvert. The unintended consequence of this strategic essentialism is then a “disjuncture between theory and practice”; where social constructionist notions of fluid sexual identities are currently incongruent to gay and lesbian liberation politics (Epstein, 1998, p. 139).

A further consequence of strategic essentialism in gay and lesbian politics, which is particularly relevant to the current study, is the manner in which it contributed to the marginalisation of bisexual identities. Epstein (1998) cites Altman stating that “few arguments have caused as much controversy among gay audiences as the assertion of a universal bisexual potential” (p. 141). By appealing to an essential homosexual identity, any earlier references to bisexual potential or fluidity in sexual identities have been erased from gay liberation discourse.

A final historical development in gay and lesbian activism that can be briefly discussed here is how sexuality has been treated in the lesbian feminist anti-pornography movement. What became known as the “sex wars” in feminist circles had a significant impact on how sexual morality has developed to privilege certain sexual identities and practices over others. During the 1980’s and 1990’s certain strands of feminist thought, particularly lesbian feminist groupings, developed a strong response against pornography, eventually mobilising with conservative groups to campaign against explicit sexual imagery (Duggan, 1995). Anti-pornography activists associated explicit sexual imagery with women’s oppression through linking the erotic representation of women’s bodies to violence against women (Duggan, 1995). These lesbian feminist groupings extended their objections to many forms of sexuality that fell outside of the boundary of what they regarded as acceptable sexuality:

Within this framework, monogamous lesbianism that occurs within long-term, intimate relationships and which does not involve playing with polarised roles, has replaced married, procreative heterosexuality at the top of the value hierarchy The lower depths are occupied by the usual groups and behaviours: prostitution, transsexuality, sadomasochism, and cross-generational activities. Most gay male conduct, all casual sex, promiscuity, and lesbian behaviour that does not involve roles or kink or non-monogamy are also censured. (Rubin, 1984, p. 301)

Consequently, a “conservative sexual morality” developed within this formation of feminism which led to stricter policing of the boundaries within lesbian feminism and the type of sexual organisation that was regarded acceptable (Rubin, 1984, p. 302). Sexual pleasure and variations in sexual

expression, such as bisexuality, featured very low in this sexual hierarchy. Groupings of “pro-sex” activists attempted to counter this development in feminist discourse by defending excluded sexualities and insisting on a feminist discourse that supports sexual pleasure (Rubin, 1984). Their political aim was to break down strict policing of sexual activities and roles (such as lesbian feminist attacks on sadomasochism and butch femme roles as simply mirroring oppressive heterosexuality) (Rubin, 1984). Despite pro-sex feminists’ insistence on the recognition of sexual variety, the conservative agenda advanced by some lesbian feminist groupings significantly hampered bisexual representation in feminist activism.

In the context of political activism, bisexuality has then generally been excluded either through the strategic deployment of essentialist views of homosexuality, or through lesbian feminist constructions of what constitutes a valued lesbian identity. In both instances sexual variability has been denied in favour of a stable, coherent lesbian or gay identity.

It can be noted here that a frequently mentioned problematic associated with social constructionist and particularly poststructuralist resistance becomes relevant when considering the marginalisation of bisexuality in gay and lesbian activism. This problematic relates to the potential for freed up terms, such as homosexuality, to result in new hegemonies where they become reified and privileged in relation to other terms, such as bisexuality (see Minson, 1986, for such a critique of poststructuralism). Poststructuralist deconstruction aims to challenge dominant categories, such as heterosexuality, through recovering and privileging the marginalised term on which the hierarchical binary relies for its meaning (Hepburn, 1999b). A poststructuralist deconstruction would then aim to free up positions in discourse through disrupting oppressive constructions of sexuality. In this manner the marginal category, such as homosexuality, is recovered and liberated (Hepburn, 1999b). However, it is always possible for liberated terms to become reified in discourse and become another form of social control. Poststructuralist authors caution that even emancipatory terms should be continuously contested and challenged (Butler, 1995; Weedon, 1987). This problematic was also touched on in Chapter 2, where I discussed poststructuralist theory. In the next section I review how female sexuality has been constructed in dominant discourse.

3.5 Theorising female sexuality

Considering that the present study is concerned with how women construct meaning around their sexuality, it is useful to review and problematise images of female sexuality, as they have been constructed in dominant discourse. Dominant discourses, such as psychiatric, medical or legal

discourse, construct sexuality in particular ways and distinguish different sexual identities that are regulated through discourse (Foucault, 1976/1990). Women's sexuality has been described as particularly regulated through regarding the female body as "thoroughly saturated with sexuality" (Foucault, 1976/1990, p. 104). Women's sexuality is considered central to their identity and encompasses experiences such as menstruation, pregnancy and childbirth, thereby legitimating psychological and medical scrutiny and control of women's sexuality (Foucault, 1976/1990). This section will briefly review how female sexuality has been constructed over time and will argue that such constructions have implications for female subjectivity more generally.

Early Western constructions of female sexuality, prior to the Victorian era, depict an image of a dangerous and voracious sexuality (Weeks, 1987). Weeks (1987) notes that prior to the nineteenth century, "female sexuality was inevitably a problem A long cultural tradition held that female sexuality was voracious, all-devouring and consuming..." (p. 47). Within this construction women were regarded as particularly sexually driven to the extent that their sexual appetites were regarded as threatening to men (Cott, 1978; Weeks, 1987). Cott (1978) emphasises that constructions of female sexuality are of course never monolithic, and notes that the Christian belief system at the time promoted women as more spiritual than men and consequently positioned women as less susceptible to bodily or sexual desires. However, existing alongside this construction was a powerful depiction of women as sexually insatiable; an image often presented as that of a sexually aggressive female filled with carnal lust (Cott, 1978; Ellis, 1913; Weeks, 1987).

With the nineteenth century came an apparent silence around sexuality. Foucault's (1976/1990) analysis, however, rejects the notion of the nineteenth century as a period of sexual repression, arguing that to consider the Victorian silence around sex as an indication that sex was being erased from discourse is incorrect. Instead, he argues that "what is peculiar to modern societies, in fact, is not that they consigned sex to a shadow existence, but that they dedicated themselves to speaking of it *ad infinitum*, while exploiting it as *the secret*" (Foucault, 1976/1990, p. 35, emphasis in original). In this sense the nineteenth century was a time of prolific discourse on female sexuality.

Within this Victorian "discursive explosion" (Foucault, 1976/1990, p. 17), serving to regulate sex, the previously dominant construction of female sexuality as voracious and lustful was reversed to a construction of women as lacking sexual desire (Cott, 1978). Through this transformation female sexuality came to be treated as "basically reactive, responsive, brought to life only through some sort of 'reproductive instinct', or kissed into life by the skill of the wooer, the male"; thus an image of

female passivity constructed in relation to male desire (Weeks, 1987, p. 47). During the late nineteenth century women's sexuality became increasingly medicalised (Caplan, 1987) and the public discourse of women's lack of sexual desire gained further support from scientific and medical opinion. An example is Krafft-Ebing's (1931) description of women as sexually passive and his concept of sexual anaesthesia to describe a lack of sexual desire. This ideology of female passionlessness is described as the view that "women lacked sexual aggressiveness, that their sexual appetites contributed a very minor part (if any at all) to their motivations, that lustfulness was simply uncharacteristic" (Cott, 1987, p. 220).

Yet, despite the dominance of this discourse of women's lack of sexual desire, the pre-nineteenth century construction of women as lustful and "excessively" sexual remained influential, particularly as it was drawn on to regulate women "manifesting any form of deviance under the reign of passionlessness" (Cott, 1978, p. 221). In this manner it continued to exert influence as a strategy to regulate and control female sexuality, later also through psychological and medical diagnoses such as nymphomania, a diagnosis often afforded to women considered as exhibiting "too much" sexual desire as well as to women engaging in same-sex practices (Groneman, 1994).

Freud's (1905/1953) work, which exerted great influence in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, not only contributed to the ever-increasing medicalisation of female sexuality but also served to further embed female sexuality as existing in relation to male sexual needs and specifically as in the service of heterosexual intercourse. Freud created a distinction between clitoral and vaginal orgasms, arguing that during a process of psychological maturation, the "erotogenic susceptibility to stimulation" that is centred on the clitoris in young girls, is transferred to the vagina in mature women (Freud, 1905/1953, p. 221). This conclusion contradicted the widely supported medical insight dominating at the time, stating that the clitoris was the locus of female sexual pleasure and that the vagina was, as one medical text in the early twentieth century described it, "not very sensitive" and unlikely to be significantly involved in sexual pleasure (Laqueur, 1990, p. 237). However, Freud's construction of female sexuality fitted the dominant social and cultural constructions of female sexuality and was therefore accepted unproblematically. Laqueur (1990, p. 241) notes that "Freud's argument is a testament to the freedom with which the authority of nature can be rhetorically appropriated to legitimise the creation of culture". It served to reformulate the female body to fit the view that the undifferentiated (or "polymorphously perverse") sexuality of the female child is transformed through the process of maturation into the

heterosexual woman, with the concomitant heterogenital configuration to support this view. For critics of Freud, this is “a narrative of culture in anatomical disguise” (Laqueur, 1990, p. 236).

The review thus far illustrates the limiting descriptions of female sexuality that have been circulating in Western discourse, with dominant constructions representing women’s sexuality as dangerous, passive, passionless or as purely in the service of male sexual desire (Weeks, 1987). However the late nineteenth century and the twentieth century have seen an increase in the possibilities for women to self-define their sexuality and resist limiting or oppressive constructions. Generally, a more permissive treatment of both male and female sexuality has emerged, along with somewhat greater flexibility in gender roles (Caplan, 1987). At the same time, however, “radical” transgressions of normative female sexuality, such as non-heterosexual practices or resisting monogamy, are still regarded as violations in need of censure (Vance, 1998).

Much of the theory that informed understandings of female sexuality has been derived from studies that were clearly shaped by the patriarchal assumptions dominating at the time (such as the findings by Freud reviewed in this section). However in the twentieth century, several prominent studies (such as Kinsey et al., 1948, 1953; Masters & Johnson, 1966) moved away from this approach to study male and female sexuality in an apparently democratic, objective and equal manner. Feminist analyses of how female sexuality has been constructed in these influential studies have however demonstrated that despite striving for scientific “neutrality”, these studies frequently fell prey to the biases of the researchers. Superficially these studies appear to promote female sexual autonomy and fulfilment but when viewed critically they are found to reflect the heteronormative patriarchal discourse dominant at the time (Miller & Fowlkes, 1987).

In their analysis of research by Kinsey et al. (1948; 1953), Miller and Fowlkes (1987) argue that Kinsey’s work extends the nineteenth century construction of sexual anaesthesia in women by describing women as sexually less responsive than men. Kinsey also described the women he studied as more likely to value male sexual satisfaction higher than their own. However Miller and Fowlkes (1987) argue that Kinsey never addressed the fact that men are socialised to “give full expression to their sexuality as an indication and demonstration of their masculinity” and that “female sexual response has traditionally been thought to be appropriately derived from relationships with men and their needs” (p. 150). Kinsey attributed his own social meanings, shaped by norms of the time, to female participants’ responses, without exploring their own accounts for “evidence” of how they construct meaning around their sexuality.

While the landmark research by Masters and Johnson (1966) attempted to dispel Kinsey's notion that women are less sexually responsive, their findings have been similarly critiqued. Through obtaining physiological data of the sexual response cycle in men and women, they indicated that women have the same capacity for sexual pleasure as men. They demonstrated that the extent of female sexual pleasure is determined by the quality of the sexual encounter. Furthermore, the highest intensity of sexual pleasure was the result of clitoral self-manipulation, and the lowest by heterosexual coitus, thereby directly challenging the heteronormative Freudian construction of female sexual maturity. Of significance to feminist theorists of female sexuality was that these findings disrupted the notion of heterosexual intercourse as primary and depicted women as sexually autonomous in experiencing pleasure. This challenge to the depiction of female sexuality as being in the service of male sexual satisfaction is however mediated by instances where Masters and Johnson revert to a heteronormative interpretation by describing female genital anatomy in ways that deny autonomy and emphasise heterosexual intercourse as the norm (Miller & Fowlkes, 1987).

A critical reading then indicates that, despite challenging the dominant construction of women's passionlessness and heteronormativity, the work of twentieth century researchers such as Kinsey et al. (1948; 1953) and Masters and Johnson (1966) ultimately uphold the traditional discourse by rendering female sexuality as in the service of heterosexual desire (Miller & Fowlkes, 1987). Miller and Fowlkes (1987) state that these key studies in human sexuality fell prey to "imbu[ing] behavioural data with social meanings, but the meanings are those of researchers, not of the women they study" (p. 148).

More recent research indicates that these constructions remain powerful. Discourse analytic work by authors such as Hollway (1984) and Gilfoyle, Wilson and Brown (1993) has demonstrated the continued salience of traditional constructions of female sexuality. Hollway (1984) describes three discourses in her analysis of male and female participants' constructions of heterosexuality and the subject positions it designates for women. In describing what she terms the "male sexual drive discourse", female sexuality is constructed in relation to male sexuality, which is regarded as driven by a biological need that must be satisfied. Women are regarded as having lower sexual desire than men, continuing the construction of women as passionless, and as directing their sexuality into pleasing men. This discourse does not articulate women as actively pursuing their own sexual pleasure but instead as "yielding" to male desire in the absence of their own sexual initiative. This

construes female sexuality as passive and as existing only in the service of fulfilling male desire (Hollway, 1984).

Hollway's (1984) description of the "have/hold discourse" refers to the notion that women can only find sexual expression in the context of a monogamous, committed heterosexual relationship, such as marriage. Two positions are implicit in this discourse. On the one hand, women are constructed as almost asexual in that their satisfaction lies not in sexual pleasure but in having emotional intimacy, a fulfilling family life and a context in which to express their maternal instinct. On the other hand, the construction of women's sexuality as dangerous and in need of being controlled remains influential. Women are regarded as sexually voracious, and through submitting to male control in the context of a marriage, their sexuality is reined in (Hollway, 1984).

Hollway (1984) argues that these two discourses exist alongside what she terms the "permissive discourse", where monogamy is resisted and people are considered free to express their sexuality. Similar to the male sexual drive discourse, it considers sexuality as natural and argues that the expression thereof should not be repressed. It differs from the male sexual drive however in that *both* men and women are argued to be free to actively initiate a sexual relationship, opening up the possibility for women to claim a sexual identity with agency equal to that traditionally associated with men. However Hollway (1984) argues that the practices of the permissive discourse have contradictory implications for women – it espouses sexual activity without romantic or emotional bonds but still exists alongside other more traditional constructions of female sexuality. Such an open and unrestricted expression of sexual desire becomes problematic for women in a broader discursive context where non-monogamous female sexuality is equated with negative notions of promiscuity and exploitation.

Gilfoyle et al. (1993) in seeking to extend Hollway's (1984) analysis, describe a further discourse of sex as a pseudo-reciprocal gift in their interviews with young men and women. (Heterosexual) sex is described as a process of transaction whereby women give themselves to men in order to satisfy men's sexual desire, and men reciprocate by giving women sexual pleasure or orgasm. This construction renders women as passive objects, either surrendering themselves for the sake of male pleasure, or passively receiving pleasure. Gilfoyle et al. (1993) point out that this echoes earlier constructions of female sexuality that serve to eroticise male dominance, citing Stekel's (1926/1936) statement that "to be roused by a man means acknowledging oneself as conquered" (p. 190). Such a construction negates any agency or self-determination women might have over their bodies in

sexual encounters. The reciprocal nature of giving that occurs during sexual interaction is then clearly illusory, as it requires of women to relinquish control to men who are positioned in the active role of conferring the gift of sexual pleasure onto women. Gilfoyle et al. (1993) make a point that is relevant to the current study when they describe the centrality of men to the experience of sexual pleasure: “if men are absent then so is sex, and the possibilities of lesbian sex or women’s autoeroticism are ruled out” (p. 195).

This brief review illustrates that although women (and men) are now more likely to enjoy increased freedom in self-defining their sexuality, normative constructions of female sexuality remain influential, where the “ideal” female sexuality entails a passive, monogamous and less lustful woman, expressing her sexuality in the service of male sexual pleasure. Within such a normative construction, female same-sex experiences are delegitimised through their absence in the academic texts reviewed, and when discussed they are constructed as transgressing the normative ideal of heterosexuality.

This powerful influence of heterosexuality on defining female subjectivity is described by Rich (1980) as compulsory heterosexuality. By using this term, Rich (1980) argues that the system of heterosexuality exists not only on the level of partner choice or sexual practice, but involves a more pervasive gendered organisation of social existence. Through the hierarchical positioning of the gender binary, heterosexuality produces and regulates what is regarded as an acceptable female subject and thereby contributes to the systematic oppression of women. Butler (1990) also refers to this regulatory function of heterosexuality in her discussion of the heterosexual matrix, where heterosexuality is constructed as desirable, natural and normal. In the heterosexual matrix, heterosexuality is regarded as normative and implicates a “causal continuity among sex, gender, and desire” (Butler, 1990, p. 22). In this manner gender and sexuality are performed in relation to the regulative discourse of heterosexuality that prescribes what is considered as acceptable acts in support of the coherence of the category female. Cranny-Francis et al. (2003) articulate the influence of heterosexuality by stating:

The power of compulsory heterosexuality is that for those whose lives conform to its demands, it acts as a constant reinforcement and regulatory mechanism, producing its compliant readers as viable social subjects and regulating any thoughts they might have about alternative gender roles or sexual choices. For those who do not conform to its demands, on the other hand, compulsory heterosexuality acts as a mechanism of exclusion

and oppression, because it consistently constructs them as outsiders, aberrant and bad. (p. 19)

By constructing female sexuality in relation to heterosexuality, any practices that resist this regulatory framework position the person as outside of what is normal and considered as a legitimate subject (Cranny-Francis et al., 2003). Rubin (1984) refers to the “charmed circle” of sexuality where certain sexualities, such as heterosexual, marital, monogamous and reproductive are considered as existing inside the circle of privilege, while other “deviant” or “abnormal” sexualities are placed outside of what is considered acceptable in the sexual value system. Butler (1990) articulates this in terms of regulating norms, where bodies, genders and desires are naturalised in support of the heterosexual matrix. Such norms include “ideal dimorphism, heterosexual complementarity of bodies [and] ideals and rule of proper and improper masculinity and femininity”; these regulating norms determine what is and what is not considered “intelligibly human” (Butler, 1999, p. xxiii).

Thus, Butlerian theory allows for the exploration of how not only gendered identities, but also other binary frames such as that of sexuality are sanctioned and regulated (Bordo, 1992). Through Butler’s performativity framework, the illusion of authenticity of heterosexuality is “thrown in fresh, critical relief, and productive ‘trouble’ can be made for entrenched assumptions about what is ‘natural’ and what is ‘unnatural’” (Bordo, 1992, p. 169). In this way, new possibilities are created and individuals can potentially inhabit different modes of being that are not restricted to the binary formulations of sex, gender and sexuality (Hey, 2006).

The discussion now briefly returns to constructions of gender, by considering how the body is implicated in theorising sexuality.

3.6 Sexuality and embodiment

In considering sex, gender and sexuality, poststructuralist theorists such as Foucault (1976/1990) and Butler (1990, 1993a) have advanced a view of the body as predominantly a social construction. While this has opened up possibilities to question previously “untouchable” constructs, fixed as they were in naturalising discourses of the body, it has also raised questions regarding the plausibility of theorising sexual acts, identities and desire as separate from bodily experience (Vance, 1998). Theories positing the body as a social construction have increasingly been critiqued by theorists advancing an embodied theory of gender and sexuality (e.g. Connell, 1994; Holland, Ramazanoglu, Sharpe, & Thomson, 1994; Sampson, 1998a, 1998b). In order to explore some of these critiques I will

first revisit Butler's (1990) theorisation of gender and the body before considering some of the arguments in favour of reintroducing the body in theorising social practice.

Butler (1990) states that "there is no recourse to a body that has not always already been interpreted by cultural meanings" (p. 8). The body, according to Butler (1990) is neither a passive medium onto which cultural meanings around gender are inscribed, nor is it an instrument that can appropriate a particular cultural meaning by "taking on" a gender. She rejects these two views of the body, stating that the body itself is a construction. It can be noted that Butler (1990) does not argue that any imaginable construction of gender is available to subjects; instead she states that cultural discourses around sex and gender define what is considered as constituting "the imaginable domain of gender" (p. 9). What is of relevance to the current discussion is that Butler (1990) does not consider bodies as pre-discursive but instead as created through discourses of what is considered natural (male or female) sexed bodies (Butler, 1990).

Butler (1993a) then completely rejects the notion of an underlying reality of extra-discursive or "ready-made" objects, onto which cultural constructions can be inscribed. For Butler (1993a), nothing can be described as existing outside discourse, as the very act of referring to an object as extra-discursive implies demarcating the boundaries of what "will and will not be the stuff of the object to which we then refer" (p. 11). The act of delimiting what is considered as pre-existing and what is considered constructed involves drawing a boundary of what constitutes the object under discussion, and therefore implies an act of construction (Butler, 1993a). For Butler, all arguments concerned with embodiment then have a constructionist basis, as even critics of constructionism have to engage in an "initial discursive act that sets forth the boundaries of whatever will become an object in the first place" (Sampson, 1998a, p. 37).

Considering that biological determinism has contributed to oppression based on gender, it is not surprising that feminists such as Butler have privileged constructions of gender as entirely discursive (Connell, 1994). Critiques of Butler's theorising of sex and gender as socially constructed have however mounted, with many theorists arguing that social constructionism has erased the body from theorising (such as Connell, 1994; Sampson, 1998a; Vance, 1998). The advantage of social construction theory, in that it deconstructs categories such as sexuality and gender that have become essentialised, is in this sense also a disadvantage. Deconstruction has opened up previously naturalised and fixed areas of theorisation and has allowed critical questions to be asked, but it has also had the effect of closing up areas of investigation where the body or physiology is concerned.

Vance (1998) asks if it is possible to include the body in social constructionist theorising, without resorting to essentialism: “Are there ways to integrate bodily sensation and function into a social construction frame, while still acknowledging that human experience of the body is always mediated by culture and subjectivity, and without elevating the body as determinative?” (p. 167).

Sampson (1998a, p. 38), in his appeal for including the body in social theory, states that social constructionist treatment of the body has centred on describing the body as an object through generating “talk that is about the body”, instead of appealing to an embodied discourse. Sampson (1998b) particularly focuses his critique on Butler’s (1990) rejection of a pre-discursive body, where Butler argues that “there is no recourse to a body that has not always already been interpreted by cultural meanings” (p. 8). Although social constructionism has challenged dominant discourse by engaging in debates around how the body is constructed, it has avoided including the body in theorising social practice as embodied (Sampson, 1998b). It has perpetuated a view of discourse as residing only in language, with the body being positioned as disconnected from discourse (Bayer, 1998). Sampson (1998a, p. 31) refers to this as the object-body in social constructionist theorising; through generating discourses about the body social constructionist theory posits the body as “the body that is known as a third-person observer knows any object in the world”, as opposed to engaging in what he terms embodied discourse. In this manner he equates the social constructionist treatment of the body to the objectivist scientific traditions that social constructionism attempts to challenge. By speaking *about* the body instead of from a position that recognises that language itself is embodied, social constructionism mirrors the spectator’s approach it has so strongly critiqued (Sampson, 1998b).

Sampson (1998a) uses the term embodied discourse to refer to:

The intrinsically embodied character of human endeavour: to the idea that we are socialised into both a linguistic and a bodily community of practices such that what we say and the embodied quality of how we say it are simultaneously engendered and inextricably intertwined. (p. 38)

For Sampson (1998a) such a conceptualisation of social practices as embodied implies a move away from viewing the body and language as separate, and instead posits a joint way of being in the world. In this sense, “we cannot stand outside the body when we engage in discourse, for we are always within the body in and through which we are able to talk” (Sampson, 1998b, p. 24). The aim of such an argument is not to revert to a discursive/pre-discursive dualism but instead to

acknowledge that the discursive domain includes not only language but that it is “fully embodied” (Sampson, 1998b, p. 26).

Connell (1994) offers a similar argument by insisting that bodies cannot be erased from experience; “bodies and bodily experiences are implicated in revolt and transformation, as well as in discipline” (p. 11). This is echoed by feminist authors such as Holland et al. (1994), who note that the “material body and its social construction is entwined in complex and contradictory ways which are extremely difficult to disentangle in practice” (p. 22). Connell (1994) argues that bodies are irreducibly involved in social experience and that agency of bodies in social processes should be introduced into our theorising. She advocates a view where bodies are “seen as sharing in social agency, in generating and shaping courses of social conduct”, what she terms a body-reflexive practice (Connell, 1994, p. 13).

The call to include the body in theorising sexuality is not limited to a theoretical exercise; instead the disembodied nature of current conceptualisations of sexuality is argued to have political implications (Holland et al., 1994; Sampson, 1998b). Holland et al. (1994) appeal to theorists to resist Butler (1990) and Foucault’s (1980) conceptualisation of gender and sexuality as predominantly constructed, stating that by dissolving the physical into the social, women’s experience of the physicality of bodily encounters (particularly relevant to sexual activity) is erased. A construction of female sexuality as disembodied requires of women to present a passive, disconnected body (Holland et al., 1994). Theorising female sexuality as disembodied then has the implication of limiting the ways in which women can assume agency in their sexuality; such a view risks duplicating traditional gender hierarchies in that the female body “becomes passive, rather than actively embodied” (Holland et al., 1994, p. 24-25). By including the body in theorising sex, gender and sexuality, opportunities are created for women to re-appropriate their bodies and desires (Holland et al., 1994).

Increasing calls for engaging the body in theorising female sexuality have resulted in the development of strategies to increase embodied accounts in research. Pauw (2009) suggests the inclusion of descriptive accounts of embodied features of interview contexts, such as participants’ visual presentation as well as descriptions of the physical space in which interviews take place. She also emphasises that assuming an embodied approach to discourse implies that the researcher herself should reflect on her embodied presence in the research process - the researcher is positioned as “thinking with a body, located in time and space where the encounter with research

participants happens in a praxeological moment where different discursive fields and inscribed bodies connect” (Pauw, 2009, p. 39). Dé Ishtar (2005, p. 363) argues for the value of attending to non-linguistic aspects of participants’ communication, such as gestures and facial expressions, in order to include the “language of the body” in analysing discourse.

Finally, although not possible to include in the scope of the current project, recent efforts to include the body in theorising sexuality have drawn on visual research methods. For instance, a study by Bowes-Catton, Barker and Richards (2011) made use of photography to research bisexual individuals’ embodied experiences of producing and inhabiting a bisexual identity. These authors argue that language-based methods can be limiting particularly when theorising bisexuality, since participants often move between rejecting and re-inscribing binary formulations of gender and sexuality due to the “structural constraints of discourse forc[ing] them to locate their accounts of sexual subjectivity within the very binary paradigm they so vehemently rejected” (p. 257). They continue to describe how, through incorporating visual methods in studying bisexuality, they were able to facilitate new ways for participants to talk about their gendered and sexual subjectivity, that recognised that individuals’ “lived and felt experiences of the social world take place in embodied material and spatial contexts” (Bowes-Catton et al., 2011, p. 257).

3.7 Conclusion

In this chapter I aimed to highlight some of the prominent debates around sex, gender and sexuality. I discussed the utility of upholding the sex/gender division in feminist theorising, where presenting sex as biologically determined and gender as dependent on social factors has proven to have political value. Such a theorisation of sex and gender has allowed feminists and gender activists to argue that the gendered constructions on which patriarchal oppression is based are variable and can be challenged. I also highlighted poststructuralist critiques of this strategy, where theorists such as Stanley (1984) and Butler (1990) have argued that the acceptance of sex as biologically determined is problematic and leaves sex untheorised. Instead these authors argue that sex itself is constructed, and that it is gender that provides sex with meaning.

The review also considered how sexuality has been theorised. I reviewed literature indicating that an essentialist binary of heterosexuality and homosexuality has historically dominated most social science research; this has had the consequence of rendering bisexuality invisible in texts theorising sexuality. Social constructionist theories emerged as a challenge to the essentialist theorising of sexuality but similarly neglected to theorise bisexuality, framing their debates mostly in reference to

heterosexuality and homosexuality. Social constructionist approaches were however shown to offer valuable accounts of how such categories are constituted through discourse. The discussion then turned to Butler's deconstructive account of sex, gender and sexuality. I paid particular attention to the strategies for subversion posited by Butlerian theory.

The review also considered how dominant discourse has constructed female sexuality over time, illustrating the continuing salience of restrictive constructions of female sexuality as dangerous, passive and sexually less responsive than men. It highlighted the heteronormative assumption evident in discourses around female sexuality, where same-sex experiences are either rendered invisible, or depicted as transgressing the heterosexual norm and therefore deviant.

The chapter concluded by picking up on one of the main challenges of poststructuralist theory. Poststructuralist analyses of sex, gender and sexuality set out to challenge dominant discourse that posit fixed and essentialist accounts; however, its insistence on rejecting any pre-discursive contribution resulted in a theory of sexuality that is disembodied. Authors such as Connell (1994), Sampson (1998a, 1998b) and Holland et al. (1994) argue for the inclusion of the body in theorising sexuality, through acknowledging what can be termed embodied discourse. This is argued to be particularly relevant to theorising female sexuality, where discourse that includes the body resists depicting the body as passive and disconnected.

The theorisation of sex, gender and sexuality that will inform the present study is based on the poststructuralist notion that, like all categories of identity, these categories are constructed through discourse. Dominant discourse presents a seemingly natural fit between bodies, genders and sexual desire. However, as argued by Butler (1990) and other poststructuralist theorists, this manner of structuring and regulating gender and sexuality is not rooted in an objective material reality; it is socially constructed. The effect of dominant discourses of gender and sexuality is not limited to sexual practices; instead these discourses have a constitutive function in that they posit an "acceptable" gendered and sexualised female subject, one that fits neatly within the regulating discourse of heterosexuality.

Despite the compelling and insistent influence of heteronormative gendered discourse, discourses remain open to change and can be challenged through the emergence of counter-discourses (Hollway, 1984). It is with this in mind that the present study aims to explore how women who

identify as bisexual negotiate their identities in a context of the regulating effects of compulsory heterosexuality.

In the next chapter I review literature related to female bisexuality in order to provide an overview of how female bisexuality has been constructed in discourse over time.

CHAPTER 4

CONSTRUCTIONS OF FEMALE BISEXUALITY

4.1 Introduction

In the literature review that follows I review international research focusing on bisexuality, as well as the handful of South African studies that explore the realities of bisexual women. Considering that the present study is concerned with the subjectivities of bisexual women, I mainly focus on how female bisexuality has been constructed, with very few references to male bisexuality. I first situate bisexuality in a historical framework by providing a brief overview of how bisexuality has been constructed over time, notably in ancient Greece and Rome, and also consider the impact of religious discourses on sexual ethics. Thereafter I provide an overview of how bisexuality has been constructed in psychological discourse and finally consider broader public discourses of female bisexuality. I conclude with a consideration of the potential of bisexuality to destabilise the traditional binary logic of gender and sexuality that dominates in most societies.

4.2 Historical accounts of bisexuality

4.2.1 Bisexuality in classical Greece and Rome

In attempting to trace the historical construction of bisexual discourse many authors cite the fluid sexual practices documented in classical Greece and Rome (such as Cantarella, 2002; DuBois, 1995; Veyne, 1985). This is often done in an attempt to retrieve bisexuality from historical invisibility since bisexual practice, although occurring in rare historical accounts, has predominantly been absent from the history of sexuality (MacDowall, 2009). The terminology of bisexuality, homosexuality and heterosexuality are of course modern inventions and different categories of sexuality were not known to the peoples of ancient Greece or Rome (Cantarella, 2002). However, bisexual behaviour was common and socially sanctioned in particular forms in classical Greece and Rome (Cantarella, 2002). This was particularly the case for men – accounts of female same-sex sexuality were generally not documented and sexual relationships between women were not socially sanctioned in Greece and Rome (Cantarella, 2002).

Fluid sexual practices between men were accepted in Greek and Roman times since the distinction in sexual behaviour was one of activity or passivity, with men assuming an active role and women a passive role (Cantarella, 2005). As long as they were in an active role, Greek and Roman men could demonstrate their virility by subjugating either male or female partners (Cantarella, 2005; Veyne,

1985). A common same-sex practice in Greece, restricted to males, was that of pederasty, the practice of an adult male courting a young boy. This practice appears to have developed in the late seventh century BC and is described in historical texts as mostly occurring during the Archaic and Classical periods (Nissinen, 1998). Pederastic relationships in Greece were socially visible and were often marked by desire but also served the purpose of educating young boys to eventually become proper citizens (Cantarella, 2002). These adolescent boys were relegated to a passive role but were expected to assume an active role in sexual behaviour, with men or women, once they become adults (Cantarella, 2005).

In ancient Rome homosexual experiences between men were also common and regarded as “normal”. These experiences were documented particularly in early Roman history from the second century BC onwards (Boswell, 1980) and differed from the pederastic relationships of the Greeks (Cantarella, 2002). Sex between males was an extension of the dominant social roles of Roman men, in that it was practiced in contexts where it could indicate power and domination. It is for this reason that male and female slaves were subjected to sexual domination but not free Roman men or young boys who would grow into Roman men (Cantarella, 2002; Veyne, 1985). Since Roman masculinity was constructed along the binary of activity and passivity, bisexuality was regarded acceptable as long as the male was the active or penetrating partner during sexual activity, regardless of the sex of his sexual partner (Cantarella, 2005).

Greek pederastic relationships as well as Roman men’s same-sex practices illustrate that in classical Greece and Rome the option to have heterosexual as well as same-sex experiences was socially sanctioned only for men, and not for women. Foucault (1976/1990) also refers to the privileged male discourse of sexuality that dominated in classical Greece. Very few documented references to female same-sex sexuality exist (Cantarella, 2002). One reason for this lack of representation might be the particular social position of women in the ancient Mediterranean world - women in ancient Greece were barred from education or participation in public life and were relegated to a reproductive role in the private domain (Cantarella, 2002). Similarly, Roman women existed within a gendered hierarchy where women did not participate in public life (Brooten, 1996). Female sexuality was therefore not publicly visible and was considered to be something that should be controlled (Cantarella, 2002).

The main account of female same-sex sexuality during this time comes from the life and poetry of the Greek poet Sappho from the island of Lesbos, who lived around the seventh century BC

(Davenport, 1980; DuBois, 1995). Sappho's poetry provides a challenge to privileged male sexuality through celebrating erotic female same-sex sexuality (DuBois, 1995). The same-sex relationships described by Sappho differ in several ways from the pederastic relationships of men in Greece (Cantarella, 2002). Instead of the distinct educational value that pederastic relationships entail, Sappho's writings describe female same-sex sexuality in terms of deep affection and love (Cantarella, 2002).

Whereas the poetry of Sappho provides an account of female same-sex sexuality from the subject position of a woman, the sparse accounts in ancient Rome are all filtered through the writing of men (Cantarella, 2002). The construction of Roman female same-sex sexuality is not the celebrated love between women that is evidenced in Sappho's writing, but instead an image of vulgar, unnatural acts between "depraved" women (Brooten, 1996; Cantarella, 2002). Considering that Roman men were in a dominant social role, the notion of women seeking pleasure from other women served to disrupt male dominance. This resulted in representations of female bisexuality in Rome as unnatural and socially reprehensible, unlike the socially sanctioned depictions of male bisexuality (Cantarella, 2002).

4.2.2 The influence of religious discourses on sexual ethics

Before the introduction of Christianity, the Greek and Roman acceptance of male bisexuality had already been altered by the pagan sexual ethics of self-control and abstinence. Pagan beliefs held that sexuality is only acceptable if channelled towards procreation, and such beliefs established a negative view of same-sex sexuality and a preference for heterosexuality (Cantarella, 2002; Veyne, 1985, 1987). Widely supported interpretations of Biblical texts have resulted in the Judeo-Christian religions extending this sexual ethic into a punitive and moralising view of same-sex sexuality (Cantarella, 2005).

Most current interpretations of the Hebrew Bible as well as the Christian Bible condemn same-sex sexuality as sinful and unnatural (Brooten, 1996). This is based on verses from Paul in his letter to the Romans (included only in the Christian Bible) and verses from the book of Leviticus, which presents legislation and codes aimed at ensuring the holiness of the people of Israel (included in both the Christian and the Hebrew Bible). While the Hebrew Bible makes no reference to female same-sex sexuality, it does condemn male-male sexual intercourse (Walsh, 2001). The only reference to female same-sex sexuality in the Christian Bible is in Paul's letter to the Romans. I will first discuss the relevant verses from the book of Leviticus, before turning to a discussion of Romans 1:26-27.

The widely cited verses from Leviticus that are often used in support of arguments opposing same-sex sexuality include Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13. Both references make no mention of female same-sex sexuality. Leviticus 18:22 is addressed to men only: “You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination”. In Leviticus 20:13 the focus is again on male-male intercourse: “If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall be put to death, their blood is upon them”⁵. Several explanations have been proposed for the omission of female same-sex sexuality from these ancient Israelite laws. Brooten (1996) suggests that the patriarchal system that dominated at that time implied that lawmakers were simply more concerned with male behaviour than they were with female behaviour. Another suggestion is that because these texts are placed within the context of purity concerns in Leviticus, they are more related to possible defilement through the commingling of excrement and semen, which could occur during male-male anal intercourse, than they are to sexual ethics (Olyan, 1994). Female same-sex relations would not involve the commingling of two defiling substances and would therefore not necessitate inclusion in these laws⁶ (Olyan, 1994).

Despite the fact that female same-sex sexuality is not mentioned in Leviticus, these verses are still frequently employed to condemn female same-sex sexuality in addition to male same-sex sexuality. This is illustrated in an example cited by Brooten (1996), where an American colonial statute from New Haven (formulated in 1656) placed the death penalty on male-male as well as female-female sexual relations. This statute first cites Leviticus 20:13, and then continues to note that “if any woman change (sic) the natural use, into that which is against nature, as Rom.1:26, she shall be liable to the same sentence, and punishment” (as cited in Brooten, 1996, p. 195).

Many of the current interpretations of Biblical texts argue that Paul’s letter to the Romans replaced the previous distinction between active and passive sexuality – dominant in the ancient Mediterranean world – with a total condemnation of same-sex sexuality, regardless of the gendered

⁵ Authors such as Boyarin (1995) and Olyan (1994) argue convincingly that although anal intercourse between men was prohibited by the Levitical laws, other homoerotic acts between men were not. The reasons for ancient Israelite laws prohibiting male-male anal intercourse in particular are complex; Olyan (1994) provides a thorough discussion of various scholars’ interpretations.

⁶ Olyan (1994) notes that according to such reasoning defilement would also occur during male-female anal intercourse, yet it is not prohibited anywhere in the Hebrew Bible. He suggests that this might be because male-female anal intercourse did not necessarily form part of the range of sexual acts practiced at the time, and would therefore not be included in the Levitical laws (Olyan, 1994).

roles assumed in sexual behaviour (such as Cantarella, 2002). To emphasise the introduction of this distinction between homosexual and heterosexual, Paul, in his letter to the Romans (Romans 1:26-27), specifically makes reference to the condemnation of female same-sex relations in addition to male same-sex relations: “Their women exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural, and in the same way also the men, giving up natural intercourse with women, were consumed with passion for one another”. Some readings of this Biblical text argue that the inclusion of a reference to women indicates that it is not the notion of what constitutes masculine sexuality that is under consideration, as is the case in Roman sexual ethics, but instead the entire concept of same-sex sexuality that is being decisively and without exception condemned (Cantarella, 2002). The widely held interpretation of this Biblical text is then that same-sex sexuality, for men as well as women, is unnatural and sinful (Cantarella, 2002).

However such a reading of Romans 1:26-27, where same-sex sexuality is condemned as sinful, has been challenged by scholars who argue that these texts cannot be interpreted without taking into account the historical and cultural contexts in which they were written (Dreyer, 2005). Paul’s letter to the Romans is situated within the particular gendered, sexual and status-related norms that prevailed in the ancient Mediterranean world (Tolbert, 2002). Scholars such as Brooten (1996) disagree with the view that Christian sexual and gendered ethics differed significantly from Roman views during that period, stating that “early Christians shared certain fundamental assumptions about sexual relations and gender with their contemporaries” (p. 190-191). The negative evaluation of female same-sex sexuality in Romans 1:26-27 is then based on the patriarchal views shared by the early Christians as well as the non-Christian world at that point in time (Brooten, 1996).

This patriarchal model of gender and sexuality – one of dominance and submission, with an adult male assuming the dominant role – implied that sexual relations did not occur between people of equal status and any sexual act that transgressed this model was regarded as unnatural and was therefore deplored (Tolbert, 2002). Women who assumed an active role, through having sexual relations with other women, were seen as engaging in acts that violated their “natural” passivity and transgressed the asymmetric sexual order (Brooten, 1996). Through his reference to women who “exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural” (Romans 1:26), Paul is then not condemning female same-sex sexuality per se, but instead condemning behaviours that contravened the accepted patriarchal model of gender and sexual relations. It is an extension of the view that “nature calls for men to be superordinate and active and for women to be subordinate and passive”, shared by the early Christians as well as other Mediterranean cultures (Brooten, 1996, p. 192).

Thus far I have focused the discussion on the treatment of same-sex sexuality in the Judeo-Christian tradition. The motivation for this is that Christianity has been particularly influential in shaping political and social identities in South Africa. Although there is some religious diversity in South Africa, close to 80% of South Africans consider themselves Christian, making Christianity the most common religion in South Africa (StatsSA, 2001)⁷. However, regardless of religious identification, Christianity has informed South African realities on many levels. Christian-nationalism informed the development of apartheid ideology in South Africa, and Afrikaans churches, particularly the Dutch Reformed Church, were supportive of segregationist policies (Dubow, 1992). Under the apartheid regime, South African schools followed a curriculum based on a system of Christian National Education, where Christianity explicitly and implicitly informed education and socialisation in schools (Chidester, 2003). Christian discourse therefore shaped South Africans' realities not only on a religious level but had a wider impact on political ideology, pedagogy and socialisation. Consequently, even if individuals do not identify as Christian, the normative influence of Christianity remains evident in the social realities of most South Africans, and also in their constructions of sexuality (Delius & Glaser, 2002).

As far as other religious texts' treatment of same-sex sexuality is concerned, most texts share a focus on condemning male-male sexuality, with little concern for female-female sexuality. In the Islam faith, for example, the Qur'an prohibits male-male intercourse, while no mention is made of female same-sex sexuality (Bouhdiba, 1985). Although female same-sex sexuality is largely omitted from religious texts, it does not mean that religious discourse is not used to discriminate against lesbian and bisexual women. As noted earlier, prohibitions against male same-sex sexuality in religious texts are generally extended to also fuel condemnation of female same-sex sexuality. To conclude, it can be stated that popular interpretations of religious texts, particularly in countries where a Christian worldview predominates, are drawn upon when constructing same-sex sexuality as sinful and unnatural – a construction that has fuelled discrimination against gay, lesbian and bisexual individuals (Brooten, 1996).

⁷ This is followed by 1.46% identifying as Islamic, 1.23% as Hindu and 0.17% as Jewish, while 15.1% of South Africans consider themselves non-religious (Statistics South Africa, 2001).

4.3 Bisexuality in psychological discourse

Current understandings of religious discourse have constructed heterosexuality as the only “natural” expression of sexuality. Early psychological theories, in turn, influenced this construction by considering bisexuality in medical terms of illness and pathology.

4.3.1 Psychoanalytical accounts of bisexuality as pathology

Psychoanalytical theorists mainly described bisexuality in terms of pathology and deviance (Murphy, 1984). Freud was particularly vocal about his views on bisexuality but mostly discussed bisexuality in relation to the development of homosexuality (Murphy, 1984). Freud’s views on bisexuality evolved over a period of time and were often inconsistent; at times he depicts bisexuality as a more “natural” psychological state while at other points he describes it in pathological terms.

Freud (1937/1963) describes sexual desire as diffuse and open – in his view all human beings are bisexual in that everyone has the potential to choose male or female sexual objects:

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 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, either in a manifest or a latent form. (p. 261)

This universal bisexual potential is described as a primordial state in which sexuality is undifferentiated. In this primordial state individuals have the “freedom to range equally over male and female objects” (Freud, 1905/1953, p. 145). However, bisexuality is associated with an infantile stage of psychic development and is not regarded as a healthy psychological state for an adult. Although Freud contends that all individuals are originally bisexual, the expectation is that over time people eventually limit their object choices to only one sex. In homosexual and heterosexual individuals this repression requires constant effort (Freud, 1937/1963). This leaves bisexuals in a state of less conflict as they do not need to relentlessly repress one of the object choices (Freud, 1937/1963). In this sense, Freud (1937/1963) describes bisexuality as an ideal polymorphous state where libidinal energy is freely distributed. However, despite this apparently positive view of bisexuality, Freud contends that bisexuality is an indication of immaturity as the individual failed to successfully resolve the stages of psychosexual development that determines healthy adult

functioning (Murphy, 1984). In this view, heterosexuality is regarded as the normal or healthy outcome of development (Freud, 1937/1963).

Stekel (1922/1946), a contemporary of Freud, focussed his work on homosexuality as a form of pathology. Stekel concurred with Freud's view that all people are bisexual and that the "normal" individual represses his or her homosexual desires:

I am of the opinion that all persons are bisexual. The disposition toward homosexuality exists in everyone; the homosexual represses his heterosexuality; the heterosexual his homosexuality. I further maintain that the homosexual component remains in everybody, but it depends upon the patient if he will indulge in it. (Stekel & Frohman, 1930, p. 443-444)

Similar to Freud (1937/1963), Stekel (1922/1946) contends that the repression of homosexual desire occurs during puberty and is part of the normal developmental process. For Stekel, Freud and most other psychoanalytical theorists of that time, the notion of constitutional or universal bisexuality was acceptable, but the ideal course of development was for all individuals to eventually repress any homosexual desires and maintain an exclusively heterosexual orientation. In this manner bisexuality is considered as the undifferentiated and immature site from which other sexualities develop, with heterosexuality being the healthy outcome and homosexuality the pathological outcome of psychological development (Rapoport, 2010). It is not theorised as an option that can be taken up by a psychologically mature adult (Angelides, 2001).

The implication of this is that even a more positive reading of Freud's views on bisexuality falters when considering the pervasiveness of the heterosexual norm, since Freud's formulation of a primary bisexuality functions to support a heterosexuality/homosexuality binary (Butler, 1990). Bisexuality is theorised by Freud as existing in the past, as a primordial state that serves as the site for the emergence of either a homosexual or heterosexual identity, but not as a viable sexual identity in itself (Angelides, 2001). Butler (1990) asserts that "the effort to locate and describe a sexuality 'before the law' as a primary bisexuality or as an ideal and unconstrained polymorphousness implies that the law is antecedent to sexuality" (p. 74). Freud's formulation of bisexuality implies that the social and cultural laws that regulate sexuality act themselves out during the course of development and function to repress homosexual desire (Garber, 2000), or in the case of psychological dysfunction, repressing heterosexual desire (Freud, 1937/1963). However, Butler (1990) contends that Freud's theory does not provide for an ideal state that exists prior to repression of heterosexual or homosexual desire; instead "the illusion of a sexuality before the law is

itself the creation of that law” (p. 74). The notion of bisexuality as an ideal state that exists outside the law of repression only becomes possible “once the idea of the law is in place” (Garber, 2000, p. 184). A reading of Freud’s bisexuality as an ideal state prior to the heterosexuality/homosexuality binary is then dismissed; instead this positioning of bisexuality preceding the binary is in fact argued as only being possible because of the very existence of the heterosexual/homosexual binary (Butler, 1990).

4.3.2 The inconceivability of bisexuality

Where psychoanalytical theorists mostly constructed the bisexual individual as psychologically immature and as deviating from the heterosexual ideal, the theories that followed generally insisted that bisexuality was inconceivable and thereby effectively rendered it invisible (such as Bergler, 1956; Stern, 1961). Bergler (1956), a prominent psychoanalyst in his time who held disparaging views of homosexuality (Drescher, 1997), considered the simultaneous attraction to both males and females to be impossible. Within his view, individuals who regard themselves as bisexual are denying their homosexual orientation:

Bisexuality - a state that has no existence beyond the word itself - is an out-and-out fraud. The theory claims that a man cannot be - alternatively or concomitantly - homosexual and heterosexual. Nobody can dance at two different weddings at the same time. These so-called bisexuals are really homosexuals with an occasional heterosexual excuse. (Bergler, 1956, p. 80-81)

While bisexuality was increasingly rendered invisible through statements such as Bergler’s, psychology as a discipline sharpened its focus on homosexuality as pathology. In 1957 homosexuality first entered the DSM-I as a sociopathic personality disorder (American Psychiatric Association, 1957), followed by the DSM-II listing it as a sexual deviation in 1968 (American Psychiatric Association, 1968). Although this classification of homosexuality as a psychological disorder certainly had negative implications for individuals who identified as bisexual, the absence of any reference to the term bisexuality in these editions of the DSM was indicative of its invisibility in psychology at that time.

4.3.3 Challenges to psycho-medical discourses of bisexuality

The first challenge to the notion of bisexuality as deviant and pathological was through the work of Kinsey and his colleagues, who also contributed to the somewhat increased visibility of bisexuality, especially in the United States. Through an investigation into sexual behaviour in men (Kinsey et al.,

1948) and later in women (Kinsey et al., 1953), the Kinsey Reports challenged public discourses of what was considered normal or abnormal sexual behaviour. Kinsey et al. (1948; 1953) conceptualised bisexuality as existing on a continuum of sexual orientation. This view was different from the dominant heterosexual/homosexual binary that considered sexual orientation in terms of categories that are mutually exclusive. Kinsey et al. (1948, 1953) instead developed a scale that measured sexual orientation on a continuum from exclusive heterosexuality with a value of zero, through to exclusive homosexuality with a value of seven. In the middle of this continuum was a category for equal heterosexuality and homosexuality, which can be considered as bisexuality (Kinsey et al., 1948).

Stein (1992) however points out that assigning people to the middle of the continuum is conceptually problematic as it groups together people with dramatically varied sexual practices and desires. He notes that according to the scale, bisexuality can refer not only to “people who are erotically inclined to both men and women” but also to “primarily heterosexual people who on one occasion engaged in same-sex sexual activity” and “primarily homosexual people who engaged in an isolated instance of other-sex sexual activity” (Stein, 1992, p. 335). Furthermore, such a conceptualisation of bisexuality does not entirely disrupt the heterosexuality/homosexuality binary, as it still conceives of bisexuality as a category that comprises of composite parts of heterosexuality and homosexuality, thus deriving its meaning from the dominant binary system of sexuality (Däumer, 1992).

Furthermore, the Kinsey scale can be criticised as not being a true continuum, as individuals have to be placed in one of the seven categories dictated by the scale. In this sense it still conforms to an essentialist conceptualisation of sexuality as distinct “types” or categories. However, the manner in which it conceptualises sexual orientation paved the way for a social constructionist approach that reflects fluidity. Kinsey et al. (1948) did not view sexual orientation as fixed but instead argued that one’s sexual orientation can vary over the course of a lifetime:

... there is a considerable portion of the population whose members have combined, within their individual histories, both homosexual and heterosexual experience and/or psychic responses. There are some whose heterosexual experiences predominate, there are some whose homosexual experiences predominate, there are some who have had quite equal amounts of both types of experience 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 pigeonholes. The living world is a continuum in each and every one of its aspects. (p. 639)

The publication of the Kinsey Reports was followed by more challenges to the dominant discourse in psychology that regarded homosexuality as pathological. Researchers such as Hooker (1957) and Szasz (1970) served to destabilise the illness model within which homosexuality was interpreted. Hooker (1957) compared the psychological adjustment of homosexual and heterosexual male participants and concluded that there were no differences between the groups, thereby deconstructing the dominant association between homosexuality and mental illness. Szasz (1970) argued that homosexuality should not be regarded in terms of pathology and disease and that psychiatry uses such a construction of homosexuality to exert social control. However, both Hooker (1957) and Szasz (1970) focused on homosexuality and made no reference to bisexuality, with the implication that its invisibility in psychology remained largely in place.

By 1973 the challenges to psychology's negative construction of homosexuality gained impetus and homosexuality was deleted from the list of psychological disorders in the DSM. The DSM-III (American Psychiatric Association, 1980) however continued to refer to homosexuality through a new diagnosis called ego-dystonic homosexuality. In the DSM-III-R (American Psychiatric Association, 1987) this diagnosis was removed and the only mention of homosexuality was under Sexual Disorders not Otherwise Specified, referring to marked and persistent distress regarding one's sexual orientation. It is again noticeable that no mention is made of bisexuality in these editions of the DSM, emphasising its absence from psychological and psychiatric discourses at the time.

It is in this context of resistance against psychology's negative treatment of homosexuality that affirmative theories of homosexuality began to emerge in the 1970s and 1980s. However, it was only until much later that bisexuality began to receive attention in psychological research.

4.3.4 Affirmative approaches to bisexuality

4.3.4.1 Bisexuality identity formation as a linear progression

Initially, more positively framed approaches to sexual orientation focused on homosexuality through, amongst others, theories of homosexual identity development. Within these models, bisexuality only featured as a transitional stage in the final development of a homosexual identity and was not studied as a sexual orientation separate from homosexuality. A widely studied theory of homosexual identity formation is that of Cass (1979). Her linear model entails six stages: identity

confusion; identity comparison; identity tolerance; identity acceptance; identity pride; and identity synthesis (Cass, 1979). Within this model, heterosexual feelings or experiences are regarded as interfering with the formation of a positive homosexual identity, thereby constructing bisexuality as a temporary or transitional stage in achieving a well-adjusted homosexual identity.

Several other theorists developed models of identity development pertaining to homosexual men and women (such as Chapman & Brannock, 1987; Minton & McDonald, 1984; Plummer, 1975; Ponce, 1978), with similar work on bisexuality remaining largely absent. However, more recently the increased visibility of bisexuality has resulted in a handful of models for bisexual identity development emerging. Similar to the sequential stage models of identity development proposed by theories of gay and lesbian identity, theories that account for bisexual identity development are predominantly based on a stage sequential approach. Weinberg, Williams and Pryor (1995) propose a stage model of bisexual identity development based on their research with both male and female bisexual individuals. As a first stage, it is proposed that the individual experiences initial confusion, where feelings of sexual attraction to both males and females are experienced as unsettling and disorienting. Confusion during this stage is exacerbated by the sense that one has to choose either a heterosexual or homosexual identity, with bisexuality not considered a socially valid option. The second stage concerns finding and applying the label of bisexuality. This stage entails accepting feelings of attraction to both males and females and becoming comfortable with a bisexual identity. This occurs through various ways, including having a sexual encounter that confirms feelings of attraction, becoming part of a community of individuals who identify as bisexual or learning about bisexuality from books about the topic.

A third stage proposed by Weinberg et al. (1995), is that of “settling into” the identity. This entails not only acceptance of bisexual feelings but also a sense of identifying as bisexual, or “a more complete transition in self-labelling” (Weinberg et al., 1995, p. 31). These individuals become less concerned with others’ views of their sexual preference and consider themselves part of a supportive community. Weinberg et al. (1995) posit a final stage of bisexual identity development which they argue is unique to bisexuals. This fourth stage is that of continued uncertainty about their sexual identity, despite having reached a stage where they adopt the label bisexual. These authors argue that this uncertainty and doubt is partly due to the lack of social validation that is received for adopting a bisexual identity, which makes it difficult to consistently sustain over time.

Bradford (2004), in exploring sexual identity development in men and women who identify as bisexual, proposes four stages in the formation of a bisexual identity. Firstly, the stage of questioning reality includes feelings of doubt and pressure to identify as either heterosexual or homosexual. During the second stage, inventing the identity, the individual increasingly accepts feelings of attraction to both men and women and starts to define their identity as bisexual. In the third stage, that of maintaining the identity, the individual must preserve their identity as bisexual in the face of marginalisation and a lack of validation in both heterosexual and homosexual contexts. Finally, the stage of transforming adversity entails engaging in social action through participating in a bisexual community (Bradford, 2004).

Bradford (2004) states that this model is in contrast with the model proposed by Weinberg et al. (1995) in that rather than using heterosexual identification as the starting point, a third of her participants initially identified as homosexual. Furthermore, she notes that the first two stages of her model correspond with the model of Weinberg et al. (1995) but that the latter two stages differ. In the model of Weinberg et al. (1995) the last two stages are marked by the presence of some uncertainty and doubt about sexual identity, while the stages proposed by Bradford (2004) are signified by affirmation and certainty of bisexual identity.

4.3.4.2 Social constructionist challenges to stage theories

Stage theories of identity development have been criticised as depicting identity development as proceeding through a linear progression of stages with little variability, based on an assumption of identity development having a fixed beginning and end-point (Eliason, 1996). Social constructionist approaches to bisexual identity have proposed that bisexual identity is not fixed and that assuming a particular sexual identity is negotiated amidst various contextual influences (Rust, 1993). Rust (1993) states that linear stage models are inadequate since the development of sexual identity “is not orderly and predictable; individuals often skip steps in the process, temporarily return to earlier stages of the process, and sometimes abort the process altogether by returning to a heterosexual identity” (p. 51).

Bisexual women often disclose their sexual orientation to others at a later age than lesbian women, and exhibit what is regarded as less “stable” sexual identities (Rust, 1993). Within a framework of stage sequential models of identity development where the acquisition of a stable sexual identity is the desired outcome, uncertainty and change are indicative of psychological immaturity (Rust, 1993). A social constructionist approach however rejects the notion of an essential identity that is

settled into through a developmental process. Instead, an individual will identify him/herself in relation to his/her social context. With the social world continuously changing, variation in sexual identity is not regarded as undesirable (Rust, 1993).

In my review thus far I have focussed on how bisexuality has been constructed in available historical accounts of sexuality, as well as its treatment in psychological theories. I now broaden the boundaries of the review to also include public discourses of bisexuality and consider how bisexuality is typically positioned within such discourses. There is of course a constant interplay between what I term here public discourses and the discipline-specific discourses I have reviewed thus far. Psychological theories of sexuality are influenced by broader public discourses and in turn impact on how sexuality is constructed in discursive formulations in a public sphere. The separation here is then to a large extent artificial.

4.4 Constructions of female bisexuality in public discourses

The emerging body of research related to female bisexuality has predominantly focused on dominant constructions of bisexuality and their impact on the subjectivity of bisexual women. These constructions mostly depict bisexuality negatively and function to invalidate bisexuality as a sexual identity. In this section I review these constructions of female bisexuality, before considering attempts by bisexual women to retrieve bisexuality from invalidation in public discourses.

4.4.1 The cultural unintelligibility of bisexuality

Within the culturally dominant heterosexual/homosexual binary of monosexism, bisexuality is rendered unintelligible (Bower, Gurevich, & Mathieson, 2002). Monosexism is a term used analogous to heterosexism to refer to the “dichotomous construction of heterosexuality and homosexuality (i.e. monosexualities) as the only legitimate forms of sexuality” (Rust, 2002, p. 204). Bower et al. (2002) use the term cultural intelligibility to denote “the ways in which bisexuality is constructed as incomprehensible and illegitimate within the dualist logic of hetero/homo” (p. 36). I first discuss how such unintelligibility can relate to bisexual practice not being identified as such, in that instances of same- and opposite-sex erotic interactions are dismissed as situational. This is followed by a discussion of the manner in which such unintelligibility of bisexuality negates the possibility of claiming a bisexual identity.

Stobie (2003) notes that in African contexts in particular, bisexual practice is often discounted and forced into a heterosexuality/homosexuality binary. Such unintelligibility of bisexual practice can be

traced back to early accounts of female bisexuality in African contexts. Anthropological texts typically described bisexual practice in such contexts as “situational bisexuality”, where same-sex interactions are described as occurring mainly because of restrictions on heterosexual activity (Aina, 1991). Herskovits (1938) makes reference to female same-sex relations in his publication on Dahomey youths where he describes sexual-erotic play among girls. He describes these activities between female youths as part of adolescent development where male and female youths have limited contact and therefore restricted opportunity for sexual interaction. Evans-Pritchard (1970), in fieldwork among the Azande in Sudan, also ascribes the occurrence of female same-sex sexual activity to a lack of opportunity for intercourse with male partners. Evans-Pritchard (1970) recounts how informants described to him that wives in polygamous marriages would have scarce opportunity to sleep with their husbands and would satisfy each other for sexual release. In that sense, bisexual practice is rendered less valid, and bisexuality as an explanatory framework is dismissed through insisting on participants’ “inherent” heterosexuality.

Describing fluid sexual practice within a framework of situational bisexuality points to a historical reluctance to acknowledge the existence of same-sex sexuality in African contexts. Epprecht (2006) refers to this as a colonial misrepresentation of African sexualities being purely heterosexual, where same-sex sexuality has historically been construed as “un-African”. More pertinent to the current discussion, descriptions of situational bisexuality also indicate a refusal to consider bisexuality as a valid sexual practice - participants are instead positioned as inherently heterosexual and as only resorting to bisexuality when deprived of opportunities for opposite sex contact.

In contemporary research, the unintelligibility of bisexuality is not restricted to bisexual practice but also extends to how claiming a bisexual identity is viewed as incomprehensible in dominant discourse. Monosexuality positions heterosexuality and homosexuality as the only categories of sexuality and within this discursive structure bisexuality is not considered to be an authentic or viable sexual identity (Bower et al., 2002). A construction of bisexuality as indecision is often called upon to support the cultural unintelligibility of bisexuality. In viewing bisexuality as indecision, there is an incitement for individuals to commit to either heterosexuality or homosexuality, or as bisexual women often describe it, to “get off the fence” (Bower et al., 2002, p. 36). This indecision is often constructed in heteronormative terms as simply being sexual experimentation, where the person engaging in same-sex relationships is seen as experimenting or following a trend of sexual permissiveness (Rust, 2002). Rust (2002) refers to the example of college students in the United States being depicted as more likely to experiment with lesbian identities during their studies but

adopting a heterosexual lifestyle once they leave college. In this construction of bisexuality, the person is expected to eventually return to a normative heterosexual identity after the period of sexual experimentation, and bisexuality is not considered as a more enduring sexual identity (Rust, 2002).

This incitement to “get off the fence” is constructed in somewhat different terms in lesbian spaces. Bisexuality is often doubted by lesbian communities through beliefs that bisexual women are going through a transitional phase that will ultimately be resolved through accepting their homosexual identity (Bower et al., 2002; Rust, 1995). This resonates with psychological theories of identity formation discussed earlier in this chapter, by reducing bisexuality to a stage in the development of an enduring and stable homosexual identity. Contributing to the view among lesbian women that bisexuality is only a phase is the common occurrence that many lesbian women initially have relationships with men before committing to an exclusively lesbian identity (Hartman, 2005). Lesbian women’s view of bisexually-identified women experiencing a similar process in establishing an eventual lesbian identity is then often based on their own narrative of their sexuality, where bisexuality acts as a “gateway” into the lesbian community but not as a more enduring identity (Hartman, 2005). A participant in Ault’s (1996) research provides the following account of discrimination resulting from inhabiting an ambiguous sexual identity in a lesbian community:

I used to identify myself as ‘confused’, then I figured out I was bi; internally, it was joyous. I was fairly uncomfortable with ‘confused’ as an identity. Externally, well, someone tried to kill me because I am attracted to women, and all my lesbian friends dumped me when I came out as bi. Seems like, to me, they thought ‘confused’ was better. (p. 454)

Although some individuals might ascribe their same-sex experiences to being part of experimentation or a transition to a homosexual identity, such constructions can be perceived as condescending as it implies a lack of self-knowledge on the part of bisexually-identified women. By constructing bisexual women as confused about their sexuality, or as undergoing a transitional phase, they are positioned as ignorant of their “real” sexual identity (Garber, 2000). Constructions of bisexuality as a transitional or experimental identity also serve to reinforce the invisibility of bisexuality within a dominant heterosexual/homosexual binary of sexuality (Rust, 2002).

Another consequence of the unintelligibility of bisexuality within a monosexist binary is that bisexually-identified women construct their own identity in the terms afforded by this dominant discourse (Ault, 1996). When conceived of within the heterosexuality/homosexuality binary,

bisexuality is not considered to be a complete identity with the same “wholeness” that monosexualities imply (Bower et al., 2002). Within this binary logic of sexuality, bisexually-identified individuals remain “half heterosexual” and “half homosexual”, instead of being able to claim the type of legitimate and complete identity afforded by monosexualities (Bower et al., 2002).

4.4.2 Constructions of bisexual chic

Bisexuality has at various points in history been constructed as chic and fashionable, particularly in artistic contexts (Garber, 2000). Author Virginia Woolf and poet H.D. (Hilda Doolittle) typified this in the early twentieth century (Garber, 2000). Garber (2000) cites a statement in a 1974 edition of *Time* where an interviewee asserts that “it has become very fashionable in elite and artistically creative sub-groups to be intrigued by the notion of bisexuality” (p. 19). More recently, the personal lives of celebrities such as the late South African pop singer Brenda Fassie, Hollywood celebrity Lindsey Lohan, as well as the hit song by bisexually-identified Katy Perry, *I Kissed a Girl*, have generated great media interest in and increased visibility of female bisexuality (Diamond, 2005; Munro, 2009).

These popularising accounts of bisexuality have served to increase bi-visibility: “bisexuality – and even the by now much-recycled concept of ‘bisexual chic’ – has moved steadily into the mainstream, fuelled by music videos, talk shows, sitcoms, and advertising, as well as by sexual practice” (Garber, 2000, p. 21). However, the notion of bisexual chic also implies an experimental identity that can be adopted or discarded, depending on social and cultural trends, and in this sense serves to delegitimise bisexuality. Thompson (2007) notes that while media representations of bisexual chic serve to popularise bisexuality, it also strengthens the notion of bisexuality being a trendy, and by extension, transient identity.

Another manner in which a construction of bisexual chic is employed is as a marker that strengthens the boundaries of the category bisexuality. Ault (1996) refers to bisexual women’s discourse creating distinctions between “true bisexuals” and “trendy bisexuals”. A participant in research by Bower et al. (2002) states that:

If somebody is going to claim the bisexual, like being a bisexual woman, I feel that there’s certain responsibilities that go with that It’s not just about, you know, having a little safe fling with a woman one night and then saying, oh, I’m bisexual. (p. 39)

In efforts to retrieve bisexuality from constructions of illegitimacy, where bisexuality is erased within the monosexual binary, bisexual women police the boundaries of what constitutes the category

bisexual and position women who conform to a notion of bisexual chic as not belonging to such a category.

It can be noted that a construction of bisexual chic is one that is mostly reserved for women – images of male bisexuality are not often popularised in the mainstream media (White, 2001). This is possibly due to the general eroticisation of female bisexuality, which I discuss later in this chapter.

4.4.3 Bisexuality as associated with promiscuity

Another dominant construction of bisexuality is that of bisexuality as necessarily equated with promiscuity. According to this discursive formulation, bisexual women can only identify as such if they remain involved with both men and women; a bisexual identity is then predicated on the necessity of having concurrent relationships with men and women (Klesse, 2005). In this sense being in a monogamous relationship with either a man or a woman serves to destabilise one's bisexual identity (Eadie, 1996).

For many bisexual women such a construction of bisexuality as necessarily equated with non-monogamy is considered to delegitimise bisexuality and complicates their ability to self-identify as bisexual (Bower et al., 2002). In societies that value monogamy as the ideal the association of bisexuality with non-monogamy carries with it a range of negative implications for women who claim such an identity. Within this discursive formulation the bisexual woman is constructed as hyper-sexual, as incapable of being in a faithful relationship or as an “insatiable nymphomaniac swinger” (Bower et al., 2002, p. 38).

This construction of bisexuality is common in both heterosexual and homosexual spaces. In heterosexual spaces it is often drawn on to reinforce the moral “unacceptability” of bisexuality. In her research Ault (1996) makes specific reference to prejudice among religious groups in the United States. Ault (1996) cites statements by the religious right depicting bisexuality as “the ultimate perversion” and describing bisexuals as sleeping “with anything that moves” (p. 452). In heterosexual groups that do not necessarily identify with the sentiments of the religious right, negative attitudes towards bisexuality are also common. In research conducted in the United States among self-identified heterosexual undergraduate students, the majority of participants endorsed marginalising stereotypes regarding bisexuality, such as the notion that bisexual individuals are obsessed with sex (Eliason, 2001) or are more promiscuous than individuals from other sexual categories (Eliason, 1997).

In gay and lesbian spaces the construction of bisexuality as equated with promiscuity is often drawn on to depict bisexual women as untrustworthy partners. In this construction the commitment and loyalty of bisexual women are doubted and many lesbian women believe that a bisexual partner might leave the same-sex relationship for a partner of the opposite sex, should the same-sex relationship no longer meet their needs (Eliason, 2001; Ochs, 1996).

Problematic in discursive moves aimed at countering a construction of bisexuality as necessarily equated with promiscuity, is that it reinstates the heteronormative ideal of monogamy (Bower et al., 2002). Promiscuity discourses are often drawn on to regulate and police female sexuality (Klesse, 2005), relegating a range of sexual behaviours as outside of the construction of an acceptable female sexuality. These behaviours include sex outside of marriage, sex that is not defined as heterosexual and sex with more than one partner (Klesse, 2005) – all behaviours that negate constructions of female sexuality as supporting male sexual desire and control (Pheterson, 1986). Promiscuity discourses then often function in ways that limit female autonomy and sexual agency (Klesse, 2005). Further to this, when bisexual women resist a construction of bisexuality as equated with promiscuity, a new exclusion is created in that non-monogamous bisexuals are marginalised (Bower et al., 2002).

4.4.4 The eroticisation of female bisexuality

A common construction of female bisexuality is that of an eroticised male heterosexual fantasy (Bower et al., 2002; Klesse, 2005). In this construction of bisexuality, the bisexual woman is positioned as “the ultra sex toy” (Bower et al., 2002, p. 38) or what a participant in a study by Klesse (2005, p. 452) refers to as the “hot-bi-babe” fantasy. In this manner female bisexuality is often construed in relation to male fantasies of a man either watching two female lovers having sex, or engaging in a ménage à trois with two women (Garber, 2000). This kind of positioning reduces bisexuality to sexual behaviour, a discursive formulation that occurs often in relation to non-heterosexual orientations. Gay, lesbian and bisexual identities are often depicted as centring only on sexual behaviour, while heterosexuality is more often depicted as representing a range of affective and relational qualities and is not so easily described in relation to sex only (Gagnon & Simon, 1973; Rubin, 1984).

The eroticisation of female bisexuality negates an autonomous female sexuality as bisexuality “is reduced to, and defined in terms of, its appeal to heterosexual males” (Bower et al., 2002, p. 39). In

this construction, bisexuality is constructed in terms of how it relates to male desire, and not as a sexual choice that is “valid in and of itself” (Bower et al., 2002, p. 39). The eroticisation of bisexual women as a heterosexual male fantasy acts to delegitimise bisexuality, and also contributes to the reluctance of some bisexual women to claim a bisexual identity (Bower et al., 2002). In disclosing their sexual identification to certain male friends, bisexual women risk evoking responses that objectify them in relation to a male sexual fantasy (Klesse, 2005). Eroticised depictions of female bisexuality create a “pseudo-supportive” environment for bisexual women in that female bisexuality is only considered acceptable when moderated by a heterosexist male gaze (Thompson, 2007, p. 53).

4.4.5 Bisexuality as a threat to lesbian politics

Rust (1993) notes that one might expect lesbian and bisexual women to form an easy alliance considering that both groups continue to face marginalisation in heterosexist societies. However this is not the case, as many bisexual women find it problematic to claim a bisexual identity within lesbian social spaces, recounting experiences of a hostile and exclusionary response from lesbian women, or what Hartman (2005, p. 63) describes as a “chilly climate” between bisexual and lesbian women. The tension between lesbian and bisexual women is largely accounted for by the continued influence of identity politics. As a historically marginalised group, lesbian communities have cohered around a common identity, which has helped to advance collective action (Bower et al., 2002). Such identity politics have necessitated the establishment of normative notions of what constitutes “genuine” or “legitimate lesbianism” (Bower et al., 2002, p. 42). Relationships with men were further regarded as undermining efforts to resist sexism and patriarchy (Rust, 1995). As a result, bisexual women are often viewed with suspicion because of their sexual ambiguity and their commitment to the lesbian movement is considered to be unclear (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1974; Rust, 1995). In one of the rare accounts of bisexuality in South African research, Zubeida, a self-identified bisexual woman, echoes this experience when she says:

I guess I feel oppressed as a bisexual person. Most lesbian and gay organisations don't really cater for bisexuals - I think largely because bisexuals are even less visible than homosexuals. There is also so much distrust of bisexuals in the homosexual community. (Chan Sam, 1995, p. 191)

In addition to being regarded as undermining lesbian politics, bisexual women are also often considered as risky partners by lesbian women (Hartman, 2005). Drawing on the previously discussed discourse of bisexual women as necessarily promiscuous, many lesbian women avoid involvement with bisexual women as they doubt their ability to be faithful (Klesse, 2005). There is

also a view that bisexuality is increasing the spread of HIV and AIDS (Eliason & Raheim, 1996). In lesbian communities the concern is that bisexual women can contract HIV from their heterosexual encounters and introduce it into the lesbian community when in a relationship with a woman, further adding to lesbian women's distrust of bisexual women (Israel & Mohr, 2004).

Bisexual women negotiate marginalisation in lesbian social spaces in different ways, with many avoiding disclosing their bisexual identity and instead focusing on "passing" as lesbian (Ault, 1996; Bower et al., 2002). Bisexual women may present as lesbian at the expense of their lived bisexual reality in order to gain some sense of acceptance and belonging within lesbian communities. Such adoption of a lesbian identity in the face of exclusionary moves from lesbian communities, challenges the commonly referred to notion that bisexuality is a "safe" identity (Bower et al., 2002). These authors cite a statement by Clarke (1981) asserting that bisexuality is a safer identity than presenting as lesbian, for bisexuality retains the possibility of at some point having a heterosexual relationship, which is posited as more socially valued. Garber (2000) refers to the belief that it is easier to come out as bisexual compared to coming out as gay, citing a bisexual youth stating that claiming a bisexual identity allows you to "recognise your feelings but not totally alienate yourself from society" (p. 17). However, this is not always the case, as bisexual women still face discrimination and exclusion, often in both heterosexual and homosexual spaces.

The discursive move of "playing at being lesbian" is to some extent the result of the disciplining norms imposed by the lesbian community serving to marginalise bisexuality (Bower et al., 2002; Hartman, 2005). Bower et al. (2002) note that this resonates with Foucault's (1977/1995) notion of disciplining gazes that serve to regulate subjectivity. It is also in part a result of the internalisation of such a disciplining gaze, in that bisexual women self-regulate their subjectivity through omitting or minimising aspects of their realities that may identify them as bisexual, something that is of course easier to manage when in a relationship with a woman compared to a man (Bower et al., 2002). Hartman (2005, p. 69) also mentions the discomfort and "self-imposed pressure to hide their 'heterosexual side'" experienced by many bisexual women when interacting in lesbian scenes and cultures. In order to participate in lesbian social spaces, bisexual women often resort to erasing the specificity of their bisexual identity (Ault, 1996). The cost of presenting as lesbian is often a sense of inauthenticity and a betrayal or disavowal of bisexuality as a viable sexual identity (Bower et al., 2002).

4.4.6 Bisexuality as a strategy to retain heterosexual privilege

A further dominant construction of female bisexuality is the notion of bisexuality as a strategy employed by lesbian women in order to retain some heterosexual privilege (Bower et al., 2002). A common belief among lesbian women is that bisexual women deny or conceal their “true” lesbian identity by presenting as heterosexual (Rust, 1993). This allows bisexuals to have “the best of both worlds”, without having to face the consequences of identifying as lesbian (Ponse, 1978). Zubeida, the participant in the South African study referred to earlier, describes this in the following way: “Sometimes we are seen as sitting on the fence and enjoying the best of both worlds; usually we are seen as being unable to come out of the closet” (Chan Sam, 1995, p. 191).

Däumer (1992) lists some of the social and material benefits of presenting as heterosexual in societies that remain predominantly heteronormative. These include “social endorsement and a certain visibility; legal and financial benefits (and) relative safety from homophobia” (Däumer, 1992, p. 96). In this construction bisexual women are considered as really being lesbian but are viewed as resisting a lesbian identity for fear of homophobic reactions from others, or because they are reluctant to identify with homosexuality as a marginalised and oppressed identity (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1974; Bower et al., 2002; Eliason, 2001; Esterberg, 1997).

Relevant to this is the notion of concealable stigma which states that some potentially stigmatised markers of identity, such as sexual orientation, can be concealed more easily than others in order to avoid discrimination (Goffman, 1963; Herek & Capitano, 1996). Sexual orientation, unlike other social markers such as race or gender, is not necessarily immediately obvious to others (Herek & Capitano, 1996). Bisexuality is considered to be even more easily hidden from others, compared to a gay or lesbian identity (Rust, 1993). Bisexual women can presumably present as heterosexual and thus hide their otherness more easily than lesbian women or gay men, should they remain in relationships with men only. Once they have a relationship with a woman, however, their heterosexual privilege is revoked.

Many lesbian women hold the view that bisexual women have access to resources in heterosexual spaces and are therefore not in need of the support lesbian communities could potentially offer (Rust, 1993). This view has been discounted by bisexual women asserting that they have specific needs and interests that are not met by lesbian or heterosexual resources (Rust, 1993). The relative lack of an identifiable bisexual community, compared to more well-established lesbian communities, means that these needs often remain unfulfilled (Ault, 1996; Bradford, 2004). Constructing

bisexuality as a strategy to retain heterosexual privilege then serves to further marginalise bisexual women in lesbian spaces. It also contributes to the delegitimisation of bisexuality as a sexual category through reducing it to a strategy employed to avoid lesbian stigma and discrimination (Bower et al., 2002).

4.5 Retrieving bisexuality from invisibility and invalidation

The dominant constructions of bisexuality reviewed here all serve to delegitimise and invalidate bisexuality, both in relation to heterosexual and homosexual social spaces. Such discursive formulations of bisexuality that render it invalid have consequences for the subjectivities of bisexual women, where the invisibility and unintelligibility of bisexuality render their identities unviable within discursive formulations that promote monosexualities. Although there is still a lack of research exploring the realities of bisexual women, a handful of studies have investigated how bisexual women negotiate their sexual identities in such a context of invisibility and invalidation (such as Ault, 1996; Bower et al., 2002).

Some bisexual women respond to this discursive context of oppositional sexual categories by refusing to label their sexual identity, since identifying as bisexual is experienced as serving to fix their identity (Bower et al., 2002). Despite the fact that bisexuality is often theorised as inhabiting an ambiguous space in the heterosexual/homosexual binary, the act of claiming a bisexual identity does not necessarily disrupt the fixity proposed by monosexism (Bower et al., 2002). In order to avoid such fixity, many bisexual women resist labelling their sexuality since the signifier “bisexual” functions as a “lens through which all other aspects of the self are understood” (Bower et al., 2002, p. 31). In this way “it fixes in place a cultural script that does not restrict itself to sexual identity but which is taken as defining all features of one’s character or ‘being’” (Bower et al., 2002, p. 31). For bisexual women who value a fluid and open identity, such fixing of identity along sexual categories is undesirable.

However many bisexual women, although uncomfortable with labelling their sexual identity, wish to resist the politics of invisibility that surround bisexuality (Bower et al., 2002). Bower et al. (2002) assert that bisexually-identified women resist powerful discourses of bisexual invisibility and invalidation through the construction of reverse discourses. Reverse discourses advanced by bisexual women function to make bisexuality “thinkable, nameable, and therefore viable” (Bower et al., 2002, p. 40). In the following section I discuss three such strategies that are used to advance reverse discourses of bisexuality – the first being the retrieval of bisexuality from invisibility through

mobilising around a queer identity, the second being the privileging of bisexuality through reinscribing a bisexuality/monosexuality binary, and the third being the adoption of a deviant or transgressive identity.

4.5.1 Evoking a queer/non-queer binary

Many bisexual women evoke a queer/non-queer dichotomy to resist invisibility. In Western contexts the term queer is often employed by bisexual women as a less restrictive identity compared to bisexuality (Ault, 1996; Bower et al., 2002). The term queer has been re-appropriated by gay and lesbian groups in the United States during the 1990s and has been reformulated as a broader category of identity that is not limited to those who identify themselves as gay or lesbian, but instead includes “anyone whose proclivities, practices, or sympathies defy the strictures of the dominant sex/gender/sexual identity system” (Ault, 1996, p. 456). For many bisexual women the term queer is then considered to encompass a greater range of potential positions, whereas bisexual still implies a choice between men or women, which reduces sexuality to yet another binary (Bower et al., 2002).

The term queer allows for a sense of belonging that bisexual women find difficult to attain in strictly heterosexual or homosexual spaces, where identity politics often limit the acceptance of bisexuality (Bower et al., 2002). Queer is used instead to evoke a sense of community – because of its more inclusive meaning it is easier for bisexual women to position themselves as part of a queer community (Bower et al., 2002). Queer is then used as a collective term under which persons claiming varied sexual identities can mobilise for social and political action, thereby minimising differences between gay, lesbian and bisexual identities (Bower et al, 2002).

However, it is precisely this lack of specificity when assuming a queer identity that also renders bisexuality invisible, similar to terms based on monosexualities (Bower et al., 2002). Bower et al. (2002) articulate this in the following manner:

The acknowledged tension is that the political and strategic use of the label queer undercuts the politics of bisexual visibility and legitimacy. That is, bisexuality is both subsumed by the sign queer (and thus erased) and excluded by it (and thus invalidated). (p. 33)

Ault (1996, p. 457) concurs that queer can act as a “cloaking mechanism”, creating a sense of unity but also ignoring specificity through grouping together varied sexual identities. Bisexual women can mobilise along with lesbian women under a common identity as queer but by collapsing different

sexual identities, bisexual invisibility is again reinforced (Ault, 1996; Garber, 2000). It becomes evident that the queer/non-queer binary affords bisexual women visibility as part of the queer community; however it remains a problematic identity in that it erases bisexual specificity.

Spurlin (2001) notes that queer studies, as a discipline, has been restricted by a Eurocentric bias that has excluded African sexualities from its focus. He states that queer studies:

...have shown little interest in the cross-cultural variations of the expression and representation of same-sex desire; homosexualities in non-Western societies are, at best, imagined or invented through the imperialist gaze of Euroamerican queer identity politics, appropriated through the economies of the West, or, at worst, altogether ignored. (p. 185)

The academic focus of queer studies has then typically remained on American and European sexualities. However, there has been an increasing use of queer theory as well as the employment of the term queer by South African theorists of sexuality. Reddy (2005), for example, uses the term queer in his research about varied issues relating to same-sex desire in South Africa. Amory (1997) also argues convincingly for the relevance and utility of queer in African contexts. Motswapong (2010, p. 201) employs the term queer extensively in her work about sexualities in Botswana through references to “queer communities” and “queer sexualities”.

However, a careful reading of how queer is employed by researchers and theorists in African contexts indicates that it rarely acts to support bisexual visibility or describe bisexually-identified individuals’ realities. Similar to the concern raised in international contexts, the use of queer in African contexts appears to typically erase bisexuality. While bisexuality is often explicitly named in texts that employ the term, its inclusion is rarely extended beyond such naming. For example, Motswapong (2010) includes bisexuality when she describes queer sexualities as including the “lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) community in Southern Africa” (p. 101). However, the rest of her discussion remains focused on issues pertaining to gay men and lesbian women, with bisexuality (as well as transgender and intersex) not being addressed in any substantial manner. In a similar vein, Amory (1997) relates her argument for the advancement of the term queer in African contexts to research and activism pertaining to gay and lesbian realities only, with no mention of bisexual realities. Reddy (2005) also emphasises that his use of the term queer relates specifically to a homosexual identity.

From the above discussion it becomes clear that in most international contexts queer implies a broader inclusion of varied sexual identities that resist heteronormativity, but its use in texts referring to African sexualities typically limits it to lesbians and gay men (such as in Amory, 1997; Motswapong, 2010; Reddy, 2005). It appears that the potential for queer to increase bisexual visibility or inclusion in gay and lesbian discourse has yet to be realised in South African contexts. While queer discourse in the United States and European contexts appear to allow for mobilisation and inclusion of bisexual women, bisexuality is largely absent from the emerging queer discourse in Southern Africa.

4.5.2 Evoking a bisexuality/monosexuality binary

Bisexual women also call on a bisexuality/monosexuality binary to assert the legitimacy of bisexuality (Bower et al., 2002). This strategy is quite different from the queer/non-queer binary where bisexuality is collapsed under the queer sign, along with gay and lesbian identities, based on its oppositional stance towards heterosexuality (Ault, 1996). In the queer/non-queer binary, bisexual individuals are considered as more similar to gay and lesbian people than they are to heterosexuals (Ault, 1996). However, a different configuration is used when evoking a bisexuality/monosexuality binary; bisexual identity is positioned as normative while monosexualities, which includes heterosexual and homosexual identities, are considered as “sexually limited by a pathological preference for intimacy with members of only one sex” (Ault, 1996, p. 458). Within this binary, bisexuality is construed as “open” and monosexuality as “closed” (Bower et al., 2002).

In drawing on such a bisexuality/monosexuality binary, bisexual participants in Ault’s (1996) research describe their attraction to others as unrelated to gender, as their attraction is based on “differences ... in the individuals, not in their sex” (p. 458). This is similar to Kitzinger’s (1987, p. 102) notion of participants responding to “the person, not the gender” that she discusses in her research concerned with female same-sex attraction. In constructing bisexuality in this manner, it is positioned as privileged over monosexualities, as bisexuals are open to attraction that transcends gender categories, while monosexuals are construed as limited in their sexuality (Ault, 1996). The bisexuality/monosexuality binary is also supported by notions of normativity and pervasiveness to assert the legitimacy of bisexuality (Bower et al., 2002). In this sense, bisexual practice is constructed as far more common than is publicly acknowledged, and is also construed as a more “natural” sexuality, relative to monosexualities where sexual object choice is limited (Bower et al., 2002). This claim draws on the notion of a universal bisexual potential, referred to earlier in this chapter in relation to Freud’s conceptualisation of bisexuality. In this formulation bisexuality is positioned as

transhistorical, as an innate potential that resides in everyone, and that is repressed by heterosexuals and homosexuals (Angelides, 2001; MacDowall, 2009). Blumberg and Soal (1997) refer to a similar legitimising move in their South African research, where participants drew on a subject position of the “normal bisexual” to assert their sexual identity as natural and that of monosexuals as “other”.

4.5.3 Reclaiming the deviant and transgressive

A final strategy to assert bisexuality as a legitimate category of sexual identification is identified in Blumberg and Soal’s (1997) South African research. These authors describe a subject position of the “sex-radical” where participants in their research reject monogamy and encourage “exploration of unconventional modes of sexual expression” (Blumberg & Soal, 1997, p. 87). This subject position is seen as celebrating the deviant and transgressive as it resists a limiting description of bisexuality that focuses on sexual identification or intimate relationships. This position is assumed as a form of resistance towards the norm and embraces an identity of the other. In this manner bisexual women appropriate a discourse of bisexuality as necessarily equated with promiscuity and redeploy it in the service of their own political goals: to reclaim sexual autonomy and transgressive sexual expression outside of the restrictions of monogamy discourses, which they perceive as constraining their sexuality.

4.6 The potential of bisexuality to subvert the logic of binaries

It is precisely the difficulties of identifying as bisexual in an oppositional sexual culture that are considered to provide bisexuality with its radical potential to challenge such oppositional categories. As I briefly mentioned in Chapter 1, several theorists have noted the potential for bisexual identity to destabilise the traditional binary logic of gender and sexuality (such as Ault, 1996, Däumer, 1992; Garber, 2000; Hartman, 2005). Arguing that gender is regulated in part through dominant constructions of sexualities, and in particular monosexualities, these authors consider the possibilities of bisexuality to challenge the dichotomous organisation of monosexualities and by extension also the gender binary.

Ault (1996, p. 460) argues for the possibility of bisexuality to disrupt binary thinking, asserting that “bi women refuse to locate themselves on either side of the hetero-homo divide, expressing commitments, instead, to a sexual ideology they believe capable of undermining egregious hierarchical systems of sexual difference”. Garber (2000, p. 87) articulates this potential succinctly: “... binary language will not offer a space for bisexuality because it declines to take temporality into

consideration: Bisexuality is not an 'identity' but a narrative, a story". Bisexuality complicates descriptions of sexual orientation based on involvement in either same- or opposite sex relationships; instead of conceptualising a fixed sexual identity it invites a view of sexuality as an unfolding or continuously storied identity (Garber, 2000). Bower et al. (2002, p. 47) appeal to researchers to "acknowledge the transformative potential of bisexuality and the ways in which it can confound bi-polar accounts of gender and sexuality".

Däumer (1992, p. 91) argues that bisexuality "transgresses bipolar notions of fixed gendered and sexed identities" by occupying a discursive space between the oppositional categories of heterosexuality and homosexuality. Bisexuality opens up a discursive space in which gender, as the focus for defining sexuality, can be questioned. Däumer (1992) cites Sedgwick (1990), who interrogates the automatic linking of sexual identity and gender. Sedgwick (1990, p. 8) considers various dimensions of sexuality, such as a "preference for certain acts, certain zones or sensations, certain physical types, a certain frequency, certain symbolic investments, certain relations of age or power, a certain species, a certain number of participants" and marvels at how from this litany of possibilities, a single dimension, that of gender, has been constructed as informing sexual orientation. Däumer (1992) considers bisexual discourse as offering alternatives to focusing on the gender of the person to whom we are attracted; in bisexual discourse a possibility is created to inhabit many sexual and gendered selves - discursive positions currently unavailable in monosexist discourse.

Däumer (1992) argues that the potential for bisexual discourse to disrupt binaries of gender and sexuality rests on resisting a construction of bisexuality as a third sexual option. If bisexuality is constructed as a third distinct sexual identity the oppositional sexual culture that currently predominates is simply continued. According to Däumer (1992) such a view of bisexuality, as a third identity that integrates heterosexuality and homosexuality, denies the subversive potential of bisexuality. She further argues that it is also inadequate to construct bisexuality as a divided sexual identity, where the bisexual individual is considered as comprising of heterosexual and homosexual "sides" constantly in conflict with each other. This formulation also relies on a discursive formulation of sexuality as oppositional (Däumer, 1992).

Both these formulations of bisexuality limit the potential of bisexuality to transgress binary categories, as they rely on situating bisexuality in a monosexist framework (Däumer, 1992). Bower et al. (2002) concur that the radical potential of bisexual discourse can only be realised if it is theorised,

“not as embodying elements of both heterosexuality and homosexuality, but rather as outside of the binaries of monosexism and with the potential to confound mutually exclusive sexual communities” (p. 47-48). Garber (2000) refers to this as viewing “bisexuality as eroticism, (as) ‘unpigeonholed sexual identity’, *not* bisexuality as the ‘third’ choice between, or beyond, hetero- or homosex” (p. 18). The radical potential of bisexuality lies in its conceptualisation as “a sign of transgression, ambiguity, and mutability” (Däumer, 1992, p. 103).

One way in which bisexual women can actualise this potential is through resisting the heterosexual/homosexual and male/female binaries by only provisionally labelling their sexual identification, or by resisting labelling altogether (Bower et al., 2002). Through resisting definition and by only adopting bisexuality as a provisional description of their sexuality, bisexual women retain the fluidity and ambiguity of bisexuality, and therefore bisexuality’s potential to disrupt discursive binaries of gender and sexuality (Bower et al., 2002). It might be necessary for bisexual women to at times claim a bisexual identity in order to resist monosexual hegemony but the provisional nature of such an identity should be acknowledged through “continually questioning what such an identity means” (Bower et al., 2002, p. 48).

Blumberg and Soal (1997) refer to this potential when they describe a subject position of the “non-labeller”, where any form of classification or categorisation according to sexual orientation is resisted. Participants in their study indicate that labels of bisexuality are perceived as limiting and are mostly drawn on out of a sense of responsibility to create awareness of other forms of sexual expression. By remaining open to what the term means it is then possible for bisexual women to “affirm the importance of deliberately ‘appearing under the sign’ from time to time, while at the same time permanently retaining the lack of clarity about ‘what precisely the sign signifies’” (Butler, 1993b, as cited in Bower et al., 2002, p. 34). As I discussed in Chapter 1, the subversive potential of bisexuality in challenging oppositional binaries has rarely been empirically investigated in bisexual women’s accounts. This brief mention by Blumberg and Soal (1997) is an exception to this silence in the literature. I take up this possibility for bisexuality to disrupt oppositional binaries in subsequent chapters where I present the discourse analysis of participants’ accounts.

4.7 Conclusion

In this chapter I reviewed how bisexuality has been constructed over time, starting with accounts of bisexuality in classical Greece and Rome that served to marginalise female bisexuality. I also briefly considered the influence of religious discourses on transforming views of same-sex sexuality through

adopting a punitive and moralising position. I reviewed the manner in which psychology as a discipline has constructed bisexuality, at times through depictions of pathology and at other times through rendering it invisible. Although in the minority, there are also accounts that regard bisexuality through a more positive lens, such as theories focusing on bisexual identity development that contribute to bisexual visibility.

The review continued to consider broader public discourses of bisexuality, where bisexuality is depicted as culturally unintelligible, as necessarily equated with promiscuity, as an eroticised male fantasy, as a threat to lesbian politics, or as a strategy to retain heterosexual privilege. These constructions function together to delegitimise bisexuality and also render it incomprehensible in relation to the heterosexual/homosexual binary. It is in this context of invalidation and illegitimacy that bisexual women attempt to construct their identities and the review considered strategies used by bisexual women to retrieve bisexuality from such a discursive space. It also acknowledged the discomfort such “fixing” of identity can create when a fluid and open identity is valued. The review concluded with a discussion of the subversive potential of bisexual discourse, where claiming a bisexual identity has been described as a transgression of the discursive boundaries of gender and sexuality.

It is worth emphasising the lack of African and South African literature with a focus on bisexuality. Only a handful of local studies could be identified that focus on female bisexuality and these studies were generally concerned with describing bisexual practice and not self-aware bisexual identities [such as the anthropological research conducted in African contexts by Evans-Pritchard (1970) and Herskovits (1938)]. Only two South African studies could be identified that focused specifically on women who claim a bisexual identity. The first account identified in local literature is the story of Zubeida referred to earlier in this chapter. Zubeida is a self-identified bisexual woman who presents her story in Gevisser and Cameron’s (1995) collection of gay and lesbian narratives. Zubeida’s narrative is one of five included in a section entitled *Five women: Black lesbian life on the Reef*. The chapter title’s elision of her bisexual identity with that of being lesbian is not surprising, as the rest of the volume makes no reference to bisexually-identified individuals, instead focusing on gay and lesbian realities (the book’s title further reflects this focus: *Defiant desire: Gay and lesbian lives in South Africa*). In her short narrative Zubeida refers to many of the issues faced by bisexually-identified women, mentioned in this chapter in relation to international literature: the relative invisibility of bisexuality in relation to gay men and lesbians, distrust by lesbian women, and negative depictions of bisexual women as indecisive and as sexually indulgent (Chan Sam, 1995).

The second South African study reviewed in this chapter that explicitly explores the experiences of self-identified bisexual women is that of Blumberg and Soal (1997). Blumberg and Soal (1997) conducted a focus group discussion with seven female bisexual participants who formed part of a bisexual women's group. These authors identify three constructions of sexual identity that emerged in the group, reviewed at different points in this chapter. These three positions include the normal bisexual, the sex radical and the non-labeller. They point to the complexity of negotiating a bisexual identity in that these positions are assumed in ways that are at times contradictory, in participants' efforts to present "desirable' images of their sexual selves" (Blumberg & Soal, 1997, p. 85).

It is then clear that there is a severe lack of South African research focusing on bisexuality. The present study aims to supplement the sparse available accounts of South African women who claim a bisexual identity.

In the following chapter I explicate the qualitative research methodology that was used in the present study.

CHAPTER 5

THE RESEARCH PROCESS

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter I provide an overview of the research process I followed in conducting this study. I first discuss the research questions that informed the study, followed by the process of identifying and recruiting participants, conducting individual interviews and finally using discourse analysis as an approach to analysing the interview texts. My epistemological commitment to poststructuralist theory and feminism shaped the decisions I made during the research process and throughout this chapter I focus on explicating the implications of this commitment for the methodology I employed.

In assuming a reflexive approach it is necessary to be mindful of the extent to which participants' voices might be diminished by the presence of my own voice as the researcher in the study (Parker & Burman, 1993). At the same time, my comments and reflections form part of the research report and can add value by elucidating the personal context in which the study was constructed, data were created and analytical interpretations were made (Hollway, 1989; Willig, 2008). To this end I have include my own reflections throughout this report and in this chapter specifically, where I comment on my own positioning in this study as it relates to the research process.

5.2 The research questions

Willig (2008) notes that Foucauldian discourse analysis is orientated towards addressing research questions concerned with exploring the discursive worlds that participants inhabit, as well as the implications of discourses for participants' subjectivity. The following research questions, based on the aims and objectives formulated in Chapter 1, guided me in conducting the study:

Question 1: How is bisexuality constructed as a discursive object in the talk of participants when accounting for their gendered and sexualised identities?

Question 2: How is gender constructed as a discursive object in such talk of participants?

Question 3: What are the implications of discourses of bisexuality for participants' ways-of-being in the world? In other words, how is subjective experience shaped by the manner in which these discourses position participants?

Question 4: How do participants position themselves in relation to dominant discourses of sex, gender and sexuality available in society? What are the ways in which these dominant discourses are supported, resisted or subverted in the talk of participants?

Question 5: Moving beyond the context of the research interview, what is the relationship between the discourses produced (and drawn on) by participants during the interviews and the institutions (such as social, political and material structures) encountered in participants' context?

5.3 Recruiting participants

Considering the lack of female representation in discourses that resist heteronormativity, this study focuses on the experiences of women who self-identify as bisexual. As discussed in Chapter 1, there is a dearth of South African literature related to bisexual women, with the small body of local research that attends to bisexuality being limited to bisexual behaviour and HIV risk among men. Further to this, there is a lack of research both locally and internationally that explores how gender and sexuality binaries are treated in the accounts of women claiming self-aware bisexual identities. To attend to these oversights in local and international literature, the current study is focused on an in-depth and rich study of a group of self-identified bisexual women's accounts of their gendered and sexualised subjectivity. Potgieter (1997), in the context of researching South African lesbian identities, points out that studies that use self-identification of sexual orientation as a criterion for inclusion have been criticised for not necessarily including only "real" or "authentic" lesbians. She continues that social constructionist research does not aim to provide true or totalising representations of reality but instead aims to "understand how people construct, negotiate and interpret their experience" (Potgieter, 1997, p. 116). Similarly, in the present study I regarded self-identification of sexual orientation as adequate in identifying participants.

I initially aimed to include at least ten participants in the study. This was based on convention in other discourse analytic studies, where the labour-intensive nature of discourse analysis means that small samples are generally preferred (Willig, 2008). Further to this, discourse analytic research is not concerned with generalisability but instead with detailed context-specific descriptions (Shefer, 2009). This means that a large sample does not necessarily add value and can even hinder the process of analysis if the amount of data to be analysed is unmanageable. Following Wood and Kroger's (2000, p. 77) guideline, I continued interviewing participants until I felt that I had sufficient data - or "language instances" - to build and support my analytical claims. While a smaller number of interviews might have been sufficient I extended the sample to 13 participants to ensure a measure of diversity along racial identification, as the initial ten participants were largely homogenous, particularly in terms of this social signifier.

While numerous social signifiers influence how individual identity is constituted in discourse, gendered and sexualised subjectivity have been described as especially impacted on by signifiers such as race, culture, educational background and class (Boonzaier & Shefer, 2006; hooks, 1981). Pauw (2009, p. 135) cautions that “South Africa’s particular history of privileging some voices over others.... has particular effects in terms of the discursive structure” of meanings around gender and sexuality. She continues that a homogenous sample allows access to only “a limited number of available discursive repertoires” (Pauw, 2009, p. 135). With this in mind I aimed to, as far as possible, include participants from diverse positionings in terms of social signifiers such as race and culture. Similar to Pauw’s (2009) position, my intention was not to increase the representative nature of the sample or to generalise from the findings, as that would be inconsistent with the poststructuralist approach that informed my research. Instead, my aim was to widen the potential range of discourses represented in the interviews in order to increase the richness of the findings. A full description of the final group of participants is provided later in this section.

I recruited participants in two main ways, in an attempt to obtain a sample that reflects a measure of diversity in the experiences of bisexual women. First, I made use of convenience sampling to identify potential participants through my social network. Second, I enlisted organisations that are active in lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) communities to identify additional participants, which as I will discuss below was met with limited success. After identifying initial participants through these two avenues, I used snowball sampling to further extend the sample. This entailed asking participants to introduce me to friends or acquaintances who might be willing to participate. My use of these particular sampling strategies was motivated by the widely reported difficulties involved in accessing LGBTI participants, where the marginalisation of LGBTI individuals in heteronormative contexts as well as a resistance to identification due to the risk of victimisation result in LGBTI individuals being hard to recruit for participation in research (Sullivan & Losberg, 2003).

My choice of sampling strategies was further motivated by the low visibility of bisexual-identified individuals in particular, making this an especially hard-to-reach group to study. As the literature review in Chapter 4 indicated, claiming a bisexual identity is complicated by a number of issues, including widespread marginalising stereotypes of bisexuality. For this reason, even individuals who embrace self-aware bisexual identities might be reluctant to publicly identify as bisexual. Consequently, bisexual individuals might be difficult to recruit even from spaces that are regarded LGBTI-friendly and the use of non-probability sampling methods such as recruiting from social

networks becomes more appropriate (Sullivan & Losberg, 2003). I elaborate on the sampling strategies used in the sections below.

5.3.1 Identifying participants through my social network

As a first strategy, I invited participants from my social network to participate in the study. Browne (2005) argues that the use of researcher social networks to recruit participants shapes not only the kind of participants that are included and excluded, but also influences the manner in which participants respond during the interview and what kind of information they share. Browne's (2005) comment about this constitutive impact of sampling on the research findings rung particularly true during the first four interviews. These four participants, recruited through my social network, were known to me only superficially but knew each other very well. This was to my advantage during the interviews where in certain instances having knowledge of participants' social networks and relationships was helpful since each interview expanded on my understanding of participants' social contexts. This also contributed to participants being at ease during the interviews and speaking freely about the research topic. At times I felt as if participants were perhaps "too open" in that they shared private information about relationships, affairs and soured friendships that related to other participants in the study. In these instances I felt as if I had to carefully guard these "confessions" as they were shared in confidence and could not be included in the findings in a way that would compromise any of the participants. To this end I made sure that identifying details, such as names of friends and lovers, were either altered or omitted in the presentation of the findings.

However, sampling from my social network became a disadvantage at a certain point where I felt that the range of discourses represented in the interviews was possibly being limited by my focus on participants known to each other. Further to this, sampling from personal networks can impose limits on the heterogeneity of the sample. Kitzinger (1987), referring to her research exploring lesbian identities, notes that recruiting participants from her social network resulted in a sample of women very similar to her. She continues that this was done at the expense of diversity in that her research failed to represent the "full richness of lesbians' experience, identities and ideologies" (Kitzinger, 1987, p. 255). I found that after the fourth interview it was valuable to recruit the rest of the participants from more diverse contexts in an attempt to access more varied positions to supplement those accessed in the first four interviews.

5.3.2 Enlisting LGBTI organisations to identify participants

In an attempt to widen the sample to include participants other than those in my social network, I turned to the second sampling strategy and contacted organisations active in LGBTI communities.

The organisations I approached were requested to communicate the study to potential participants and to facilitate contact. The materials used to advertise the study are attached as appendix C and include a description of the study posted on Internet forums⁸ of local LGBTI organisations, as well as a poster invitation distributed at LGBTI organisations, with an attending request for referrals of qualifying participants.

While I was aware of the potentially limited success of using LGBTI organisations to recruit participants, considering the reported lack of bisexual visibility in many such organisations, I was surprised when only one organisation was able to assist me in making contact with a participant. At this point, I was left wondering if the lack of response was indicative of some of the problems inherent to using LGBTI organisations in recruiting participants. The use of more traditional social science sampling methods, such as enlisting community-specific organisations and relying on snowball sampling has been critiqued as contributing to low diversity in samples when conducting research with LGBTI individuals. For instance, Moore (2006) describes the difficulties associated with recruiting diverse samples in conducting her research with black lesbian communities in New York, noting that recruiting black participants through public advertisements or postings at LGBTI organisations rarely yields a significant response. Had I been able to obtain a homogenous sample through these organisations (in terms of social signifiers such as race or class), this possibility would have applied to the current study. However, the near complete lack of response more likely points to low visibility of bisexuality in organisations working with LGBTI individuals, rather than an under-representation of diversity among bisexually-identified individuals served by these organisations.

The possibility of my low success in obtaining participants through LGBTI organisations being due to invisibility of bisexuality is lent further support by the general omission of bisexuality in materials produced by LGBTI organisations in South Africa. A review of prominent South African LGBTI Internet websites⁹ indicates that although bisexuality is included in the abbreviation “LGBT” (and in some instances “LGBTI”) used on these websites, the content of these websites predominantly refer to gay and lesbian identities, with very few references to bisexuality. Although I was unable to fully explore

⁸ Alexander (2002) notes that despite public perceptions to the contrary, gay and lesbian youth throughout Africa regularly access LGBTI Internet websites as a source of information, support and a sense of community. Consequently, recruiting gay and lesbian participants from such sites may prove a feasible strategy for other studies, although it was unsuccessful in identifying bisexual participants in this particular study.

⁹ The review included the following prominent local LGBTI websites: www.gala.co.za; www.triangle.co.za; www.mask.org.za; www.mambagirl.com; www.mambaonline.com; www.out.org.za

this in the context of the present study, it will be valuable for future research to study the extent of LGBTI organisations' engagement with bisexual individuals.

Following the identification of an additional participant through the assistance of an LGBTI organisation, the rest of the participants were identified through snowball sampling.

5.3.3 Description of the final sample

The final group of participants comprised of thirteen women between the ages of 20 and 29 – all of them living either in Johannesburg or Pretoria, in the province of Gauteng. All of the participants were young professionals and had either completed a tertiary degree or were in the process of completing one. The following table provides biographical information for the participants, with a more detailed description of each participant being provided in the next chapter:

Table 1: Biographical information for participants

Pseudonym	Age	"Race"	Home language	Tertiary education	Current employment
Astrid	25	White	Afrikaans	Yes	Musician
Liné	29	White	Afrikaans	Yes	Teacher, musician
Taryn	29	White	English	Yes	Musician
Nadia	25	White	Afrikaans	Yes	Journalist
Belinda	25	White	English	Yes	Management consultant
Cara	23	White	Afrikaans	Yes	Film maker
Jennifer	21	White	English	Yes	Postgraduate architecture student
Laetitia	25	White	Afrikaans	Yes	Postgraduate engineering student
Sibongile	20	Black	Zulu	Yes	Journalism student
Gemma	24	White	English	Yes	Marketing manager
Phindile	23	Black	Swati	Yes	Law student
Sonia	22	White	Afrikaans	Yes	Postgraduate psychology student
Nasiphi	21	Black	Pedi	Yes	Broadcasting student

Obtaining a diverse sample was not entirely successful as the final group of participants is homogenous particularly in terms of sharing a relatively privileged socio-economic status, having

access to tertiary education and residing in urban areas. In South Africa, 48.5% of the population live below the national poverty line (United Nations Development Programme, 2003) and 17.9% have no formal education (Statistics South Africa, 2003). Further to this, 43.7% of the population is rurally based (Statistics South Africa, 2003). In this sense, the present study excludes the voices of bisexual women from less economically privileged positions and with low access to education, as well as the voices of bisexual women living in rural areas. There are also other aspects of privilege such as age and being able-bodied that define the participants in this study; future research could benefit from exploring more diverse aspects of bisexual women's experience by including the voices of participants from a broader range of subject positions.

5.4 Interviewing

I conducted in-depth interviews to explore the discourses that construct the gendered and sexualised subjectivities of participants in the study, making use of a semi-structured interview guide to flexibly direct the interviews (attached as appendix A). The typical duration of the interviews was two to three hours, although one of the interviews extended up to four and a half hours, resulting in a total of 30 hours of interview material for analysis. I initially anticipated that the interviews would last approximately one to two hours but found that participants were generally keen to talk about the topic. In some interviews I attempted to terminate the interview out of consideration for participants' time but found that participants' were reluctant to end the interview. This is probably related to the timing of the interviews – most of the participants suggested a time where they would be relaxed and would not have other demands on them. None of the interviews took place at participants' place of work and the interviews generally had a comfortable feel with little or no time limit from the participants' side.

The majority of the interviews were conducted in English, with two interviews conducted in both English and Afrikaans and two interviews conducted in Afrikaans only. I am proficient in both English and Afrikaans and the language used depended on participants' preference. Considering that I am not proficient in Zulu, Swati nor Pedi, those interviews were, out of necessity, conducted in English; participants were however fully fluent in English and this was not a limitation to the data collection process. I translated the interviews that were conducted in Afrikaans into English, for the purposes of analysis. A research assistant (also proficient in English and Afrikaans) helped with this and confirmed the accuracy of translations. While the group of participants are linguistically diverse, English is the lingua franca in South Africa and participants were generally comfortable conversing in English, with the exception of the two interviewees who preferred conducting the interviews in Afrikaans.

Participants were requested to complete a brief biographical questionnaire (attached as appendix B) to limit unnecessary questions during the interview process. This was completed after the interview. In the following section I first discuss the feminist formulation of interviewing that informed my own approach in conducting the interviews, before proceeding to discuss the semi-structured interview guide and the process of transcribing the interview material.

5.4.1 Power and positioning in interviews

Feminist research attends very clearly to the manner in which power operates during the interview process. The more traditional hierarchical relationship between the researcher and the researched that previously dominated in social science research is rejected, as it is considered to be dehumanising and exploitative (Reinharz, 1992). Franklin (1997, p. 100) refers to this traditional approach to interviewing as the information extraction model, where the interviewer assumes an active role in eliciting “feelings, ideas, and/or knowledge” from the passively positioned interviewee. Within this highly structured relationship the researcher attempts to maintain objectivity and avoids sharing any personal information that might bias the participants’ responses (Franklin, 1997). Feminist researchers have critiqued this approach to interviewing, arguing that it suppresses spontaneity and creativity in participants’ responses (Franklin, 1997) and limits opportunities to explore unanticipated topics raised by participants (Burman, 1994b).

In the context of feminist research, this traditional hierarchical relationship is renegotiated to minimise power differences between the researcher and the participant (Reinharz, 1992) with researchers conceptualising the research process as doing research “with” instead of “on” participants (Burman, 1994b). Participants’ agency is emphasised and both the researcher and the participants are regarded as actively contributing to knowledge creation in the interview (Franklin, 1997). The interview is regarded as an “interactive encounter” (Burman, 1994b, p. 51) whereby the researcher inescapably participates in the construction of knowledge through negotiating meaning with the participant. There is a clear acknowledgement that power relations between the researcher and the participant will have an impact on “what is said and how” (Franklin, 1997, p. 104).

Feminist researchers such as Oakley (1981) suggest that non-hierarchical relationships can be promoted by the researcher sharing personal information with participants, similar to the manner in which participants share their stories with the researcher. This deconstructs the position of the researcher as the expert, and may facilitate the building of trust and therefore promote more open

disclosure during the interview process (Bergen, 1996; Oakley, 1981). Wise (1987) however warns that “in encouraging reciprocity and intimacy within the research relationship, Oakley may indeed be fostering the patronisation and exploitation that she seeks to avoid” (p. 166). Willig (2008) further notes that a researcher should not abuse the informal features of semi-structured interviewing, which may at times mirror a “normal” conversation, in order to urge participants to share more than they might feel comfortable with after the interview.

Tindall (1994) offers a response to this dilemma by stating that, as a researcher, one should disclose any information necessary to clarify one’s position in relation to both the research study and the participants, but that participants should be fully aware that they are in control of the extent to which they reciprocate. However, despite attempts to minimise the power differential between the researcher and participants, complete equality is not possible as it is the researcher who:

...is firmly positioned by participants as knowledgeable, who sets the process in motion, who decides on the initial research issue, which frameworks to use, which prospective participants to contact and what happens to the final product. In the final analysis it is the researcher’s version of reality that is given public visibility. (Tindall, 1994, p. 155)

With these issues in mind I had concerns about the ethical nature of sharing personal information in what can be considered a strategic manner, in order to elicit greater disclosure from participants. In the present study I generally did not spontaneously offer personal information, but when participants enquired about my own views and positioning I responded openly and honestly. I was particularly mindful of this during interviews where I knew the participants outside of the interview context, as I did not want to exploit the informal nature of our interaction. I found that certain unavoidable features of the interviews, such as the completion of informed consent forms and the presence of the recorder, helped to define these encounters as research interviews and not as normal conversations. However this did not diminish the more relaxed and comfortable feel of these interviews, which in my view contributed to participants speaking freely and sharing their experiences in richer detail.

5.4.2 Negotiating insider/outsider positions

Following from the feminist poststructuralist orientation towards research discussed in the previous section, I regard the interviews with participants as interactional contexts in which participant and researcher identities are “actively managed, negotiated and solidified” (Best, 2003, p. 897). Such a view implies that categories of identity are continuously shifting as identity is negotiated during the

research encounter. I was curious how my own positioning as a young (27-28 years old at the time of the interviews), white, cisgender, able-bodied feminist academic from a middle-class background would intersect with participants' identities in the interview contexts. In many respects I consider myself as similar to participants - I share participants' positioning as young and relatively privileged women with access to higher education. Further to this I knew some of the participants outside of the interview contexts and in that sense shared a social and relational context with them.

At the same time I am also different from participants in many respects, where I was often positioned during the interviews as an outsider in terms of participants' cultural contexts, their professional identities, their home language and so forth. I did not disclose my own sexual identification to all of the participants – in some of the interviews participants assumed that I identified as bisexual by virtue of my interest in the topic, while other participants either showed no interest in my sexual identification or questioned me directly at some point in the interview by asking if I identify as bisexual. This resulted in some participants framing my sexuality as a shared commonality while others presumably regarded it as either a point of difference or as unimportant.

In some instances during the interviews I was clearly positioned as an outsider also in relation to other aspects of participants' identities. One such instance was during the interview with Sibongile, where she spoke about her experience as a black woman who identifies as bisexual. She recounted the difficulties of being in a same-sex relationship and not being able to be physically expressive towards her partner when in public, due to the threat of violence and corrective rape. The full quote appears in Chapter 6 - I repeat only parts of it here to illustrate my argument:

I've never heard of a white lesbian being killed by a community. So just thinking about that, and in that frame of mind it is then different you know, to be a black lesbian, bisexual, whatever, because your reality is just a little different. Because we form part of larger communities. I'm not always here at varsity, I'm not always back home in my little suburb, I'm not always there. We form part of a larger community, when there are funerals or our families live in townships or things like that. So when we have to go there, you're gonna meet people who think they can straighten a woman by raping them.

Sibongile's use of the collective pronoun "we" and the manner in which she contrasts white and black women's realities function here to position me as an outsider in relation to her experience. She describes herself as forming part of a community – one that I do not form part of as a white woman - and emphasises that her reality as a black woman differs significantly from my reality. Interestingly,

in this excerpt Sibongile is also referring to the shifting nature of identities, where she considers herself as existing in different spaces that position her in different ways. She refers to an accepting space “at varsity” and “back home in [her] little suburb” where she can be more open in her expression of her sexuality. She contrasts this with more traditional spaces such as the “larger community” she forms part of, where her identity as bisexual is rejected and exposes her to the risk of violence.

In other instances I found myself included in participants’ realities, where I was discursively positioned as an insider and certain shared understandings were assumed. During the interviews participants often used what can be regarded as urban slang, such as when Astrid referred to “macking” to denote flirting with someone. While I was not consciously aware of this during the interviews, I later noticed when transcribing the material that I would often wonder how I could translate participants’ descriptions to clarify the meaning of the terms they used. During the interviews participants did not engage in a similar process of “translating” their talk for my benefit. They did not adjust their speech in order for me to understand what they were conveying – they assumed that I was familiar with the contextually specific meanings often associated with slang and that I would “get” what they were describing. In these instances in the interviews, where participants described their experiences using their own peculiar terms and phrases, I was assumed to be similar to participants and afforded insider status.

The shifts that occurred in my positioning as insider and outsider throughout the study illustrate the dynamic and contextually negotiated character of identity. Insider/outsider status is perhaps more productively conceptualised as a fluid and shifting process than as a static binary (Allen, 2010; Best, 2003; Merriam et al., 2001). Researchers often simultaneously inhabit both insider and outsider positions in relation to participants and are both constrained and advantaged by the boundaries of both positions (Merriam et al., 2001). During the interviews I found that being afforded insider status facilitated rapport and in those instances the interviews flowed with a comfortable ease. The sense of shared understanding allowed me to question participants on aspects based on my insider knowledge of their experiences and personal narratives. In instances where I was positioned as different from participants I was able to use my ignorance or outsider status to further explore participants’ constructions. I was able to ask naïve questions and elicit more detailed descriptions based on my own lack of understanding. In this manner my positioning in relation to participants contributed to the type of knowledge created during the interviews.

5.4.3 The interview guide

I used a semi-structured interview guide to direct the interviews. A semi-structured interview guide has the advantage of making the research agenda, or any prior assumptions that the researcher might have, explicit (Burman, 1994b). Instead of denying the impact of the researcher's questions on the knowledge created during the interview, the interview guide makes these questions clear and allows for interrogation of the contributions made by the researcher (Burman, 1994b). This co-creation of knowledge is "not a *problem*, but a *feature* of interviewing" which, if acknowledged, can result in greater understanding of the manner in which knowledge is constructed and negotiated in social interaction between people (Wilkinson, 1998, p. 120, emphasis in the original). Semi-structured interviews have the additional advantage of allowing an open and flexible approach, where I was able to adapt the questions in the guide according to each participant's own account and respond to and follow up on new areas raised by participants (Burman, 1994b). Using a semi-structured interview guide supports a feminist aim of promoting more equal research relationships - participants were able to influence the direction of the interviews and the kind of topics explored, and in that way could shape the research agenda.

The interview guide was loosely structured around three main themes. Firstly, I explored how participants constructed meaning around bisexuality. Secondly, I explored how they negotiated their identity as bisexual in relation to others, and lastly I was interested in how their gendered subjectivity as women intersected with their sexuality. I found that during most of the interviews these themes were addressed without too much direct questioning by me. I preferred to be guided by participants' contributions and to follow up on the topics they introduced, instead of rigidly pursuing the questions in the guide.

5.4.4 The research contexts

Participants were typically informed about the study by a friend or a participant I had already interviewed. If they were willing to participate, I made contact with them to further explain the nature of the study and to explain what their participation would entail. During this initial conversation I told participants that we could conduct the interview at any location where they would feel most comfortable. Some participants suggested their own home while others preferred a public space such as a restaurant or a coffee shop. When participants suggested a public space I checked with them whether they would feel comfortable talking about the topic in that context.

The majority of the interviews were conducted with only one participant present. I did however conduct three of the interviews with more than one participant present. The first joint interview was that of Astrid and Taryn, who were dating at the time of the interview. I interviewed them separately as well as jointly. The second joint interview occurred when Astrid introduced me to a participant, Liné, and we conducted the interview at Astrid's home. During this interview, Astrid was present for a small portion of the interview and participated in the research conversation. The third joint interview was with Cara and Jennifer, who were also dating at the time of the interview.

I initially did not intend to conduct joint interviews and at first aimed to interview all participants separately. My motivation for preferring individual interviews was to obtain full and detailed accounts from each participant – which I thought was more likely during separate interviews. Interestingly, Morris (2001) argues against a view of individual interviews promoting depth in data collection, stating that “a separate account does not provide deeper data but different data” (p. 556). Seymour, Dix and Eardley (1995) note that despite a researcher's intentions, social and practical considerations often result in a second person being present and contributing during an interview. This is even more likely when interviewing connected participants, such as friends or partners (Seymour et al., 1995). I found that I had to be flexible during interviews and also had a desire to respect the participants' decision to be interviewed with someone else present. In some instances the joint interview was entirely unanticipated and more a result of a natural outflow of the individual interview – for example, I interviewed Astrid individually and after concluding the interview, conducted a less formal joint interview with both her and her partner Taryn present. In other instances participants indicated from the start that they wanted to be interviewed jointly, as was the case with Cara and Jennifer's interview.

Feminist researchers such as Wilkinson (1998) argue that data collection methods that separate individuals from their social context do not adequately serve a feminist agenda as one-on-one interviews risk minimising participants' agency. The greater control that participants have in a joint or group interview, compared to an individual interview, can shift the balance of power by reducing the influence of the researcher and foregrounding the interaction between participants (Wilkinson, 1998). Situating data collection methods in a social context can also lessen the likelihood of the researcher imposing her own meanings on participants (Wilkinson, 1998). During the joint interviews my own role as interviewer was diminished and I found that I asked fewer questions than during the individual interviews. Participants often questioned each other, asking insightful questions based on their knowledge of the person outside of the research interview. Participants also challenged each

other in ways that I would not have felt comfortable doing. For example, in the following excerpt Astrid speaks about the rigidity of considering oneself as lesbian or straight, instead of assuming a more fluid approach to one's sexuality. Her partner, Taryn, interjects, stating that adopting a bisexual identity can come down to a similar fixing of identity:

Astrid: Just to be able to classify yourself as one thing, for fucking 80 years, how could you do that?

Taryn: Well, you classify yourself as a bisexual, so that's something as well?

Astrid: Hmmm, good point (laughs).

I found that conducting joint interviews in addition to individual interviews led to rich interactive data and contributed to greater equality during data collection. A disadvantage of interviewing more than one person at a time was that, similar to focus groups, there was some over-talk resulting in minor instances of indistinct text when transcribing the interviews.

5.4.5 Transcription of the interviews

I transcribed the majority of the interviews myself, adapting the transcription notation I used as I went along. Once I had refined the transcription notation, a research assistant transcribed the remaining interviews. In the instances where the research assistant transcribed interviews, permission for someone else to transcribe the recording was first obtained from the relevant participant.

The theoretical focus of the particular variant of discourse analysis used in a study influences the manner in which the interview material is transcribed, while the transcription notation used in turn enables and constrains the type of interpretations that can be made based on the data (Lapadat & Lindsay, 1999). Willig (2008) distinguishes between variants of discourse analysis that follow an approach informed by discursive psychology, and variants that follow a Foucauldian approach, such as the poststructuralist framework employed in the current study¹⁰. The distinction between these two versions of discourse analysis is seen in the emphasis in discursive psychology being on “*how* people *use* discursive resources in order to achieve interpersonal objectives in social interaction” while poststructuralist discourse analysis focuses on “*what kind of* objects and subjects are constructed through discourses and *what kinds of* ways-of-being these objects and subjects make

¹⁰ Many authors however blur the distinction between these two approaches and some argue for the value of integrating both approaches when conducting discourse analysis (Willig, 2008).

available to people” (Willig, 2008, p. 95-96, emphasis in the original). In discursive psychology the analysis is typically limited to the text that constitutes the data. Poststructuralist discourse analysis widens the scope of what can be attended to in an analysis as it also considers the influence of social and other structures outside of the text being analysed (Willig, 2008).

An implication of the differences between discursive psychology and poststructuralist analysis is that the former focuses more closely on detailed transcription of the mechanics of speech through inclusion of pauses, stutters, involuntary vocalisations and other “messy” aspects of speech (Oliver, Serovich, & Mason, 2005). In comparison, poststructuralist discourse analysis typically adopts a denaturalised approach to transcription, where many of the idiosyncratic aspects of speech are removed (Oliver et al., 2005). The transcription notation that I used was aligned with a poststructuralist approach and, although I included contextual aspects such as hesitations and pauses, this was done in a denaturalised manner where the focus was on the accuracy of the “meanings and perceptions created and shared” during the interview, instead of capturing the full details of the mechanics of speech (Oliver et al., 2005, p. 1277). In assuming this approach to transcription, I also corrected grammar where I thought it would aid in the clarity of the transcribed material. Such corrections were however minimal and predominantly related to matters such as incorrect use of prepositions or errors in subject and verb agreement.

Despite excluding some details of speech during transcription, I remained mindful of retaining aspects of non-verbal communication in the transcripts. Dé Ishtar (2005) notes that:

While spoken language is a source of meaning, it is in those places beyond words that much knowledge is heard and expressed To reach this meaning, the feminist researcher draws on the language of the body. Spoken language cannot replace sensuous embodiment; it is but one element of human expression. (p. 363)

In assuming a position that discourse is not only linguistic but also embodied, I attended to non-verbal practices such as participants’ postures, gestures and facial expressions when transcribing the interviews, which I based on notes taken during the interviews as well as my own reflection immediately after conducting each interview. Including non-verbal communication during transcription allows for interview texts that can be analysed from a view that regards spoken discourse as intertwined with bodily experience and enriches the analysis (Dé Ishtar, 2005; Sampson, 1998a).

The transcription notation I used was based on the following conventions, which are also reflected in the manner in which I present excerpts from the interviews in the chapter detailing the findings:

I <u>really</u> hate it	Underline for speaker emphasis
....	Unrelated/off-topic text omitted
...	Sentence trails off
(over-talk)	Instances of overlapping talk
(interrupt)	Interrupted speech
(indistinct)	Indistinct speech
Rea-	Dash to indicate a sharp word cut-off
(laughs)	Non-verbal communication - such as gesturing or laughter

5.5 The discourse analysis

Discourse analysis is theoretically and methodologically diverse - researchers employing discourse analysis differ in terms of their theoretical focus as well as the analytical techniques they employ (Macleod, 2002). It is therefore necessary to clarify the theoretical orientations that informed my conceptualisation of discourse analysis, and also detail the analytical process I followed in conducting the analysis. The theoretical orientations that informed the study were discussed in Chapter 3. In the following section I consider the implications of these theoretical orientations for the analytical process.

5.5.1 A deconstructive discourse analysis

In the present study I make use of a deconstructive discourse analytic framework, drawing predominantly on the work of poststructuralists Derrida (1976) and Foucault (1969/1972, 1976/1990). Researchers who have employed such a framework in their analysis include Hepburn (2000), Macleod (2002) and Parker (1992, 2002). Although these researchers differ in the manner in which they employ deconstructive discourse analysis, their work provides useful guidance in how discourse analysis can be applied effectively in addressing particular research questions. Hepburn (1999b) notes, for example, that Parker's use of Derridean deconstruction is not as radical as the form of analysis for which she argues. Parker (1989, p. 4) himself states that he does not identify with the "fervent Foucauldians or derisive Derrideans" in their abolishment of the notion of ideology, which he argues has political utility. Despite these differences I found it valuable to base my own approach to data analysis on the guidelines proposed by these authors, and particularly the guidelines suggested by Parker (2002).

5.5.2 “Steps” in the process of analysis

In conducting the analysis I first read and re-read all the transcribed interviews, noting my initial impressions and personal responses to the material as I went along. I then analysed each interview separately, following Parker’s (2002) guidelines, before integrating the analysis across interviews. Parker’s (2002) suggestions for conducting a discourse analysis explicitly draw on Derridean and Foucauldian theory. He outlines seven criteria for identifying discourses, supplemented by three auxiliary criteria. It is important to note that the guidelines proposed by Parker (2002) were employed flexibly and did not always follow the sequence presented below. At times I moved between the stages proposed by Parker (2002), or left out stages that were not relevant to a particular section of text. The first seven criteria can be summarised in the following manner:

A discourse is a coherent system of meanings

Discourses map a certain picture of the world through sets of statements or metaphors (Parker, 1992, 2002). Parker (2002) notes that “the statements in a discourse can be grouped, and given a certain coherence, insofar as they refer to the same topic” (p. 146). What constitutes a topic will be informed by the culturally available understandings that circulate in any given context (Parker, 2002). Discourses have an underlying regularity in that statements cluster around systems of meanings (Parker, 2002). Such a description of discourse does not however imply that there are no contradictions in discourses, as will be discussed in subsequent sections (Parker, 2002).

A discourse is realised in texts

Everything in the world, as it is understood and given meaning by us, is textual (Parker, 2002). Discourses inhabit or are actualised in texts (Parker, 2002). After identifying which texts will form part of the analysis, a second step would then be to locate the texts in discourses (Parker, 2002). At this point a valuable part of the process of analysis is to engage in free association, where one explores “the connotations, allusions (and) implications which the texts evoke” (Parker, 2002, p. 148).

A discourse reflects on its own way of speaking

This criterion relates to the manner in which texts reflect on the world view proposed by the discourses operating in the texts. These reflections can be less obvious, such as through commentary on the terms used in the text and the use of phrases such as “don’t get me wrong”, or they can extend to detailed elaborations of the implications of the world view contained in the text (Parker,

2002). These reflections serve as confirmation for the discourse analyst that what is being described is indeed a discrete discourse (Parker, 2002). Parker (2002) notes that during this stage of analysis it is useful to ask “how are the contradictions in the discourse referred to, and how would another person (or text) employing this discourse refer to the contradictions within the discourse?” (p. 148-149).

A discourse refers to other discourses

In articulating a discourse, one necessarily draws on other discourses (Parker, 2002). Discourses “embed, entail and presuppose other discourses to the extent that the contradictions *within* a discourse open up questions about what other discourses are at work” (Parker, 2002, p. 150, emphasis in original). This links to the Derridean notion of the constant play between presence and absence in constituting meaning (Derrida, 1976). At this stage the focus is on the analysis of “implicit themes suggested by the absence of certain terms” (Macleod, 2002, p. 24).

A useful stage in identifying the manner in which discourses refer to other discourses is that of identifying contradictions in how different discourses describe objects. By contrasting discourses and the objects they constitute one can highlight the distinguishing features of discourses (Parker, 2002). At the same time, the interrelationship of discourses implies that one can also identify points of overlap between discourses, in that “discourses draw metaphors and institutional support from each other” (Parker, 2002, p. 150).

An implication of the interrelated nature of discourses is that theoretically, it is always possible for a speaker “to find a voice from another discourse, and even within a discourse they oppose” (Parker, 2002, p. 150). Parker (2002) emphasises that this is a theoretical possibility, and that in practice issues of power and ideology can limit this potential.

A discourse is about objects

In conducting a discourse analysis one inescapably engages in a process of objectification (Parker, 2002). It is possible to identify two such layers of objectification, with the first being the “reality” to which the discourse refers (Parker, 2002). This layer refers to the objects that are brought into being through the discourse. Foucault (1969/1972) describes discourses as “practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak” (p. 49). Following this argument that discourse is constructive, “the representation of the object occurs as previous uses of the discourse and other related discourses are alluded to, and the object *as defined in the discourses* is referred to” (Parker, 2002, p. 151, emphasis in original). During this stage of the analysis one would identify and describe the

objects that are referred to by the discourse, which may or may not exist outside of the discourse that constitutes it (Parker, 1992).

In addition to identifying and describing the objects that are constituted by the discourse, there is a second layer of objectification. This second layer of objectification is that of the discourse itself, where the talk, or set of statements, is in itself identified as an object (Parker, 1992). This stage of the analysis entails identifying the discourses in a text as objects that can be analysed (Parker, 1992).

A discourse contains subjects

One variety of object that discourse constructs is that of the subject, “who speaks, writes, hears or reads the texts where discourse lives” (Parker, 2002, p. 152). A discourse creates a space, or a subject position, in which the subject is assigned certain qualities and responsibilities through its positioning in discourse (Parker, 2002). Positioning, as used by Davies and Harré (2001) refers to “the discursive process whereby selves are located in conversations as observably and subjectively coherent participants in jointly produced story lines” (p. 264).

Positioning can be interactive, where the discourse drawn on by a speaker positions another person in particular ways. Positioning can also be reflexive, where a person positions him or herself in particular ways (Davies & Harré, 2001). For example, a media discourse of bisexuality being equated with promiscuity makes a subject position available of “the promiscuous bisexual”. Such a discourse interactively positions bisexual women as necessarily promiscuous. Bisexual women can in turn reflexively adopt such positioning through engaging in the discursive practices that mark a subject position of “the promiscuous bisexual” and in that way can enact the discourse in their own lived narrative. Alternatively they can reflexively resist being positioned in such a way through positioning themselves as monogamous or faithful.

This process is then clearly not one of a discourse simply positioning subjects in particular ways; it also implies a measure of agency for the subject to adopt or resist certain positionings (Davies & Harré, 2001). During this stage of analysis one attends to the implications of discourse for subjectivity, i.e. how subjective experience is shaped by the manner in which a discourse positions a person and how subjects take up certain positions in discourse (Davies & Harré, 2001; Willig, 2008).

A discourse is historically located

Discourses are not static and change over time (Parker, 2002). Discourses are also situated in relation to other discourses and appeal to past constructions of objects as they were constituted at

various points in time (Parker, 2002). This stage of the analysis will entail locating discourses in history and describing “what those discourses meant as they emerged, and so what the present allusions actually ‘refer’ to” (Parker, 2002, p. 154).

Parker (2002) continues to suggest the following three auxiliary criteria to be considered when conducting discourse analysis, in order to attend to how discourses are positioned in relation to broader institutional structures, power relations and ideological effects:

Discourses support institutions

Discourses can be implicated in the structure of institutions, by either supporting or subverting them (Parker, 2002). Certain practices serve to validate or support a discourse and in doing so strengthen the material basis of an institution. Parker (2002) provides the example of medical institutions, where discursive practices such as giving an injection or operating on a patient are discursive practices that reproduce the institution. Other practices can deny a discourse and can subvert or attack an institution (Parker, 1992). During this stage of the analysis one would identify the institutions which are reinforced or subverted by the use of a discourse and describe the discursive practices that are employed to do so (Parker, 1992).

Discourses reproduce power relations

A discourse analysis should include an analysis of power relations (Parker, 2002). This would include identifying which categories of people would gain or lose from the promotion of a particular discourse, and considering who would want to advance or resist the discourse (Parker, 1992). However Macleod (2002) cautions against slipping into a view of the subject as transcendental, through references to “categories” of people that are assumed to have a fixed or rigid status in discourse. She suggests that one takes a stronger Foucauldian stance by acknowledging the contradictory status of the subject. Discourses entail multiple subject positions and it is necessary to question which construction of the subject is called upon when analysing power relations (Macleod, 2002). This stage of the analysis will focus on analysing how power operates in its multiplicity and will avoid a view of discourses as existing in opposition to each other (Foucault, 1976/1990).

Discourses have ideological effects

Foucault (1980) resists using the term ideology, preferring to speak of regimes of truth, as he considers ideology to imply that certain systems of truth are “more correct” than others. However Parker (1992) retains the use of the term ideology, arguing that its utility lies in its progressive political effects. He uses ideology to refer to a “description of *relationships* and *effects*” which can be

usefully employed “to describe relationships at a particular place and historical period” (Parker, 2002, p. 156, emphasis in original). He notes that one should avoid strict differentiation between discourses that are ideological and those that are subjugated (Parker, 2002). Discourses can be employed in varied ways and can function to subjugate certain world views in some instances, and can be empowering in others. This stage in the analysis would entail identifying how a discourse is related to other discourses that sanction oppression, as well as elaborating on how such discourses promote the narratives of dominant groups and prohibit subjugated discourses from participating in the interpretation of history (Parker, 1992).

The first seven criteria for analysis suggested by Parker (2002) are more directly related to the structural nature of discourses, while the last three criteria relate more to the deconstructive aspects of discourse analysis (Macleod, 2002). Parker (1989) elaborates on the utility of Derrida’s process of deconstruction in relation to three phases of analysis. Firstly, one can identify the opposition in a text and demonstrate how one of the terms in the opposition is dominant (e.g. heterosexual/homosexual). Secondly, one can subvert the opposition between the terms by destabilising the privileged position of the dominant term. This can be done through illustrating how the dominant term has been positioned as such through historically specific assumptions about the term (Parker, 1989). For example, heterosexuality has been constructed over time as the only natural expression of sexuality. Thirdly, one can sabotage the conceptual opposition between the terms. This can be done through extending the meaning of the term to include that which is considered the opposition of a subordinate term (Parker, 1989). For example, sexuality can be redefined to include varied expressions thereof. Alternatively, one could use a different term to prevent the reimposition of the opposition (Parker, 1989). In some contexts the term queer has been employed to this end, in order to avoid drawing on binary logic (Bower et al., 2002).

5.5.3 Reflections on the process of analysis

In analysing the data, I found it useful to first engage in Parker’s (2002) suggested process of free association where I read through the transcripts while noting my initial impressions and associations with the text. After engaging in this process, I re-read the transcripts while referring to the following distilled questions based on Parker’s (2002) guidelines for analysis, while also keeping my own particular research questions in mind:

- Which objects are referred to in this discourse and how are they constructed?
- Which subject positions are called on to make sense of this discourse? How are participants positioned in relation to this discourse?

- What are the points of overlap as well as the contradictions between this discourse and other discourses identified in the text?
- What is the historical positioning of this discourse? According to which interpretations of history has it been constructed and how has the function and structure of this discourse changed over time?
- Which institutions are supported or subverted by this discourse?
- How does power operate in this discourse? Which constructions of the subject gain and lose from the use of this discourse, and who would want to advance or resist this discourse?
- What are the ideological effects of this discourse?

I found that the process of analysis was largely circular. In reading and re-reading the transcripts my formulation of the discourses I identified solidified, but this formulation was also continuously challenged and altered. As I continued to identify and describe discourses, I often had to return to earlier descriptions of discourses and adjust my understanding in the light of more recent aspects of the analysis. In conducting the analysis I had a sense of the discourses I identified as acting upon each other, shaping and extending the other discourses identified in the text as well as my own understanding of the discourses, as I continued along the process of analysis.

I was continuously reminded that the process of analysis is never final and that any reading of a text can always be further deconstructed. I was always waiting for a moment where the analysis would come to a close, but that moment eluded me as I realised that my current view of the text is informed by a specific focus I bring to the analysis as well as my own positioning in discourse at that point in time – my reading of the text is never final and can always be challenged and extended. I was very aware of my own contribution to the process of analysis where discourses did not simply “emerge” from the texts but were actively shaped by my own particular approach to the data. While the discourses I identified in some ways assumed a level of reification and a reality of their own, I was also actively involved in decisions regarding the focus of analysis and also the point of termination. Macleod (2002) refers to this when discussing the boundaries of deconstruction:

The question thus arises as to where erasure ends, as the erased sign is brought to a new level of presence. The answer, it appears, is that deconstruction is never complete; it is interminable, unless terminated by the practical analyst. (p. 27)

I was also continuously aware of how power relationships influenced the process of analysis and the interpretations at which I arrived. Feminist research is particularly sensitive to the manner in which

power operates, not only during the process of conducting interviews but also during the analysis of the interview texts (Reinharz, 1992). I was mindful of the potential power differential between participants and myself where I was formulating interpretations of their experiences and their realities without their direct involvement in the process. Acker, Barry and Esseveld (1983) describe their own discomfort with issues of power during analysis when they state during the analysis they “found that [they] had to assume the role of the people with the power to define. The act of looking at interviews, summarising another’s life, and placing it within a context is an act of objectification” (Acker et al., 1983, p. 429).

In an attempt to address the power differential in the process of analysis and minimise instances of objectification of participants’ realities, I presented sections of the analysis to several of the participants in order for them to comment on and extend my interpretations. While it was not possible to canvas all of the participants’ responses within the timeframe in which I had to complete the dissertation, I found that the responses I did receive provided meaningful challenges to my particular approach to the data. I also include extensive verbatim quotes in the chapters detailing the findings in order to promote the visibility of participants’ voices and allow for readers to judge the credibility of my interpretations.

However, Gilbert (1994) warns that while measures aimed at reducing power differentials can add value to the analysis, the final “power of interpretation” remains with the researcher (p. 94). It is not possible to entirely erase power differentials between the researcher and the researched and the possibility of imposing meaning on participants’ experiences remains present. Further to this, it is important to recognise that participants also exercise power throughout the research process (Wilkinson, 1998). I found this particularly relevant at points where participants made decisions regarding the location and duration of interviews, what type of content they felt comfortable discussing, and whether they wished to refer me to other potential participants. It is inaccurate to simplistically portray researchers as powerful and participants as powerless – such a view runs the risk of only describing participants in relation to their identities as marginalised or subjugated, without considering participants’ agency (Butler, 1990; Parker, 2002).

5.6 Quality and rigour in discourse analysis

Validity and reliability as criteria to judge the quality of research have been problematised in qualitative research, as the goal of research is no longer to establish “true” accounts of experience as it reflects an external reality but instead to explore the subjective and multiple meanings attached

to experience (Sandelowski, 1993). This does not mean that qualitative research is not concerned with quality. Rather, in debates about quality and rigour in qualitative research, the traditional terms associated with quantitative inquiry have been reconceptualised in terms such as trustworthiness, credibility, dependability, transferability and confirmability (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Kvale (1995) states that validity in qualitative research can be reformulated to move away from “correspondence with an objective reality to defensible knowledge claims” (p. 26).

Qualitative research is theoretically and methodologically diverse. Any criteria for evaluating the quality of qualitative research will therefore depend on the epistemological position that informs a particular study (Madill, Jordan, & Shirley, 2000). Considering that the present study is informed by a poststructuralist feminist epistemology, I found the following criteria useful in increasing the quality of the research process and the credibility of the analytical claims I formulated:

5.6.1 Grounding research in existing work

Parker (2005) suggests that one should ground one’s research in existing work. With an increase in discourse analytic studies it has become increasingly important to situate one’s study in relation to other discourse analytic research exploring the same topic (Willig, 2008). However Parker (2005) also notes that it is equally important to notice the absences in previous research – this was particularly relevant in the current study, where the literature review indicated that bisexuality has often been constructed as an object not only through explicit references to it, but also through its omission from dominant discourses.

5.6.2 Optimising internal coherence

A further consideration for increasing quality is the internal coherence of the arguments presented in this study. Internal coherence refers to “the extent to which the analysis ‘hangs together’ or is non-self-contradictory” (Madill et al., 2000, p. 13). Madill et al. (2000) point out that poststructuralist theory argues that texts are never entirely coherent and that meaning is unstable. However, the presentation of a research report benefits from following an argument that is accessible to readers and that increases understanding of the topic being researched (Madill et al., 2000; Parker, 2005). This does not imply that the account presented by the research is the only possible account – a research report can be subjected to further deconstruction by other analysts, similar to the deconstruction that the interview material in the research report underwent (Madill et al., 2000). Throughout this study, and particularly in the section detailing the findings, I aimed to

structure my discussion in a manner that is coherent and follows a clear and substantiated argument.

5.6.3 Sensitivity to participants' interpretations

As another technique to increase the quality of the study, Potter and Wetherell (1987) suggest that the analysis should take into account the participants' orientation. The focus of the research is on the distinctions participants make in their actual interactions and which have implications for the way they live every day; the analysis can therefore benefit from involving participants in commenting on the credibility of the findings. As I have mentioned, summaries of the findings were provided to interested participants during the process of analysis in order to continue the process of shared meaning making and to incorporate their comments on the summaries in the analysis. The use of this technique was not aimed at increasing the accuracy of my interpretations, in that I assumed a "true" underlying meaning to participants' accounts that I hoped to access through the process of analysis. Rather, in drawing on a poststructuralist approach to research, the aim of inviting participants' comments on the analysis was to challenge and extend my own reading of their accounts, as it was unavoidably informed and constrained by my own positioning in discourse. Involving them in this process allowed me to draw on interpretations outside of those allowed for by my own subjectivity.

5.6.4 Including aspects of investigator triangulation

Investigator triangulation, which can be described as illuminating the data from "different vantage points", involves checking one's own interpretations against that of other researchers (Tindall, 1994, p. 145). Including the perspective of someone else, preferably someone with different experiences and paradigmatic commitments, can enrich and extend the interpretations and in that way add to the thoroughness of a study (Tindall, 1994). In the absence of another researcher being intimately involved in the analysis in the present study, I engaged friends, colleagues and my study supervisor at various points in the research process to provide critical input and challenge my interpretations of the data (Tindall, 1994). Similar to my motivation for inviting participants' comments on the analysis, the aim of this was not to arrive at a closer approximation of participants' "true" meanings, but rather to extend my interpretation of the data as it is informed by my particular positioning in discourse.

5.6.5 Assuming a reflexive approach

A reflexive approach to research can contribute to increased quality throughout the research process (Willig, 2008). I assumed a reflexive orientation to the research in order to increase my awareness of my role in shaping the kind of knowledge produced. To facilitate and document this process, I kept a research journal where I reflected on how my political and social context, values, beliefs and experiences contributed to and impacted on the research (Rolfe, 2006; Willig, 2008). Wilkinson (1988) refers to this as personal reflexivity and argues that a feminist research paradigm will necessarily involve emphasising the centrality of personal experience. I comment in Chapter 1 in as well as in the current chapter on my own investment in the research topic and how my own identity, investments and ideological commitments have contributed to the research.

Parker (2005) states that one's theoretical position and the research process should be clearly detailed in order to increase the accessibility of the research report. This relates to what Wilkinson (1988) terms functional reflexivity. My identity and positioning in the research study also has implications for ontological, epistemological and methodological decisions I make throughout the research process. Functional reflexivity entails "continuous, critical examination of the practice/process of research to reveal its assumptions, values and biases" (Wilkinson, 1988, p. 495). Through clearly explicating the decisions I make and my motivations for these decisions, I allow the reader to evaluate the appropriateness and value of these decisions. My commitment to poststructuralist theory and feminism in particular is discussed at various points in this dissertation and greatly informed how I constructed the research process.

5.6.6 Creating opportunities for reader evaluation

Related to the above, accessibility of the report should ideally extend beyond transparency regarding research decisions to the presentation of the findings as well. Madill et al. (2000) note that providing excerpts of raw data can be seen as a form of grounding the analysis and increases the credibility of the analytical claims made by the researcher. This allows for readers of the report to evaluate the quality of the analysis and the conclusions reached (Madill et al., 2000). My intention with including direct excerpts from the interviews in the research report is then not only to increase the visibility of participants' voices in the research account, but also to allow for readers of the report to assess the adequacy of the analytical claims I make.

5.7 Ethical considerations in the study

The feminist orientation that informed my approach to this study had clear implications for ethical conduct. Ethical considerations were relevant throughout the research process and I commented on matters such as power relations during the interviews at various points throughout this chapter. In this section I elaborate on additional ethical concerns that have not been discussed in preceding sections of this chapter.

The study was granted ethical approval by the University of Pretoria Research Ethics Committee and was conducted according to the ethical guidelines stipulated for psychological research (HPCSA, 2006). In making contact with participants I first phoned each participant prior to the interviews to explain the nature of the study and what their participation would entail. During this conversation I emphasised that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw participation at any point. I also explained that their identities would be protected as their names would not appear in any of the documentation pertaining to the study or in the final presentation of the findings (I assigned pseudonyms to participants). I explained that anonymity will be further secured through omitting or altering identifying details such as names of family members and friends. This was particularly important as many of the participants had not disclosed their sexual identification to others.

At the start of each interview I again explained the aim of the study, confidentiality and anonymity. Participants also completed a written informed consent form and provided permission for me to record the interview; the informed consent form is attached as appendix D.

Participants appeared to enjoy the interviews and commented that they found it meaningful to explore their own views in such a focused manner. While many of the participants indicated that they often discussed issues around bisexuality with close friends, they felt that the interview was more structured and allowed them to explore their thoughts and feelings in detail. It was important that participants experienced the interviews as positive as I predominantly relied on snowball sampling to identify additional participants. If initial participants did not experience the interview as respectful and positive they would have been unlikely to refer friends or acquaintances to me as potential participants.

5.8 Summary

In this chapter I discussed the research process that I followed in the current study. I first provided an overview of the research questions, followed by a description of the sampling process and the final group of participants. Thereafter I provided an overview of the interviews I conducted with participants and the process of analysing the resulting research texts. I concluded with a discussion of quality and rigour in qualitative research, as well as the ethical considerations in the present study.

In the following chapter (Chapter 6), I provide a more detailed introduction to the research participants and present the first section of the findings from the discourse analysis, where I focus on how participants navigate dominant discourses of gender and heteronormativity. In the subsequent chapter (Chapter 7), I present the second section of the analysis, which is concerned with participants' accounts of delegitimising and silencing discourses, as well as the discursive resources drawn on by participants to reclaim bisexuality from such illegitimacy and silence. The final chapter (Chapter 8) concludes the study.

CHAPTER 6

NAVIGATING GENDERED DIFFERENCE AND (HETERO)SEXUALISED SUBJECTIVITY

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter I introduce the discourse analysis of participants' accounts. I first provide a more detailed description of the thirteen women that participated in the study, as well as further discussion of the interview contexts. This is followed by a presentation of the findings related to how participants construct their identity as bisexual women, in a discursive context in which normative constructions of sexuality and gender are salient.

6.2 The participants

In this section I introduce the participants and contextualise the research interviews. My aim here is to provide a somewhat fuller picture of the interviews and the nuances in the data. During the process of analysis, many details of the interview contexts, participants' particular orientation to the interview, as well as my own responses in my role as co-constructor of the interview data may get lost (Hardin, 2003; Morrow, 2005). Hardin (2003) notes that a poststructuralist position regards the interview as "a social performance for both interviewee and interviewer, who are simultaneously the authors, characters and audiences of the stories being constructed" (p. 540). She goes on to say that "story presentations are always sculpted by the context in which they are told", emphasising the need for the inclusion of more detailed accounts of the context in which interviews are constructed (Hardin, 2003, p. 536). Including physical and contextual details of the interviews also facilitates an embodied account of the research process (Pauw, 2009). In this section I aim to introduce some of these details into the research report.

Astrid

The first participant, Astrid, is a 25 year old white English/Afrikaans speaking woman. She is a musician and lives with her girlfriend of the past three years, Taryn, who also participated in the study. I recruited Astrid from my own social network and she enthusiastically supported the study from its inception. We had not discussed the study in depth until the interview, which resulted in Astrid being keen to share her views when we finally met for the interview.

The interview took place in the evening after work at Astrid's home and lasted two and a half hours. Upon arrival she introduced me to her partner, Taryn, and the three of us chatted for a while. Astrid and I then proceeded to their living room where she poured us each a glass of wine before we started the interview. Astrid seemed very comfortable during the interview and the fact that we

knew each other outside of the interview context facilitated rapport. Being friends, I was mindful of not making the conversation too formal and I shared my own thoughts with her at points. This felt appropriate since, as friends, it would have increased the artificiality of the interview if I did not reciprocate at times, particularly where she explicitly asked for my own view. The first part of the interview, however, was mostly focussed on her, as she was talking freely and I did not want to interrupt her, apart from probes at certain points. It was only about an hour or so into the interview that her pace of talking slowed down a bit and I started participating more in the conversation.

Liné

Liné is 29 year old white Afrikaans speaking woman and a teacher and musician. At the time of the interview Liné had just ended her first serious relationship with a man, after predominantly dating women, and was single. She was living on her own. I identified Liné through snowball sampling in that the first participant, Astrid, told her about the study.

We conducted the interview at Astrid's home and the interview lasted two hours. Liné was relaxed throughout the interview, although she had experienced emotionally taxing events in the preceding days and appeared a bit drained at times. Astrid joined us at some points during the interview, but the majority of the interview was conducted with only the two of us present.

Unfortunately a ten-minute section of the interview was lost because the recorder stopped working at one point. I wrote down what I could remember from this section immediately after the interview. At the end of the interview Liné indicated that she enjoyed talking to me and that although she often spoke about this topic with friends, she felt it was different having it "documented" in this manner as she felt she had to present her thoughts more clearly. She came across as mature, confident and sure of how she felt about her sexuality.

Taryn

Taryn, Astrid's partner, is a 29 year old white English speaking woman and a musician. Taryn initially did not want to participate in the study, despite being generally supportive of it. She explained during the interview that she was reluctant because she felt that despite claiming a bisexual identity, she was not outspoken about it and generally preferred to avoid labelling her sexual orientation. She said she changed her mind as she felt the interview would be a positive experience and looked forward to exploring her own ideas in such a focused manner.

The interview took place in the morning at her home and lasted just over an hour. She made us coffee before we went and sat outside to conduct the interview. Taryn appeared comfortable and relaxed. She was very articulate and discussed her views with a calm ease. Since we did not know each other very well we adhered to the structure of an interview more than my interview with her partner. The focus of the interview remained on the research topic, with limited informal conversation before and after the interview.

Nadia

Nadia is a 25 year old white Afrikaans speaking woman with a career in news and media. At the time of the interview she had just ended a long-term relationship with a woman and was dating a man. She was living on her own. I made contact with Nadia through snowball sampling.

I arrived at Nadia's home in the early evening after she had returned from work. We sat down in her sunroom where the entire interview took place, with neighbours coming and going through the garden in front of the sunroom and at times briefly stopping to greet us. The interview lasted four and a half hours. The atmosphere was very relaxed as Nadia was warm and talkative right from the beginning. The interview went off topic several times, but this allowed for a more natural conversation. Nadia did, however, remain aware of the interview "status" of the conversation throughout, and would at times gesture to the recorder when speaking, indicating that she was framing what she was saying in relation to being an "interviewee". I asked minimal questions, as she spoke freely and addressed most of the themes in the interview schedule without my prompting or guiding.

Belinda

Belinda is a 25 year old English speaking white woman and was single at the time of the interview. Belinda is a management consultant and indicated through a mutual friend that she would like to participate in the study. I initially wanted to interview her friend, but despite being interested at first, she later declined participation. I met Belinda one evening at a social event where her friend was also present. Belinda was interested in the study and asked me questions about it, and later indicated that she would be willing to participate.

The interview took place at my home, suggested by Belinda, and lasted just over an hour. The atmosphere was relaxed but conformed more to a structured interview context than most of the other interviews – this was most likely because we did not know each other well outside of the

interview context, which meant that the purpose of our meeting remained very salient. Belinda spoke freely but I also had a lot of opportunity for direct questioning. The interview was focused and brief compared to the other interviews. We concluded the interview once I felt we had covered all of the themes I had in mind.

Cara and Jennifer

Cara and Jennifer were dating at the time of the interview and I conducted their interview together. Cara is a 23 year old white Afrikaans speaking woman and lives with her sister. She is a film maker. Jennifer is a 21 year old white English speaking woman. She is a postgraduate student and lives with her parents and siblings. I made contact with Cara through a mutual friend and when I spoke to her over the phone to arrange the interview she said that her partner was also willing to participate, as she also identifies as bisexual.

The interview took place at an LGBTI friendly coffee shop, suggested by Cara, and lasted just over three hours. Cara arrived about 40 minutes before Jennifer, which allowed me to interview her first, before conducting a joint interview with both her and Jennifer. The atmosphere was informal, also due to the setting, but it did take a while for both Cara and I to relax and for the conversation to flow more freely. The first half an hour or so of the interview was characterised by me asking questions and Cara responding with to-the-point answers. This meant that by the time Jennifer arrived I had asked Cara all the questions I had formulated in advance.

Upon Jennifer's arrival I discussed the study with her, as well as issues around confidentiality and informed consent. I then proceeded to ask her similar questions to those I had asked Cara. I did however emphasise that Cara could respond to anything at any time, and it soon became a joint interview with both participants joining in the conversation. It was valuable to have both participants present as they often questioned each other on aspects I did not think to enquire about. They also contrasted their experiences throughout the interview – Jennifer would, for example, talk about her challenges with her family and would compare it to Cara's experiences, which resulted in richer and more detailed descriptions. The interview was pleasant and very interactive towards the end – I had the impression that Jennifer in particular enjoyed discussing the topic and it became a very lively discussion.

Laetitia

Laetitia is a 25 year old Afrikaans speaking white woman and a postgraduate student. She was dating a woman at the time of the interview and living with a friend. I made contact with Laetitia through

snowball sampling where a previous participant introduced us. We conducted the interview at a restaurant at the university where she is a student and it lasted just under two hours. Laetitia had a reflective and spiritual approach to her interactions with others, and also to her sexuality, and I enjoyed exploring her views.

Sibongile

Sibongile is a 20 year old English/Zulu speaking black woman and a university student. She was single at the time of the interview and was living with her sister. Sibongile responded to a request from an organisation active in LGBTI communities inviting interested participants to contact me via email. The interview took place at the university where Sibongile is a student and we sat outside on the lawn in a quiet area. It lasted approximately two and a half hours. Sibongile presented as self-assured and comfortable with herself – she had clearly articulated views and seemed to have thought about her identity and sexuality at length. The interview flowed easily and I had the impression that she enjoyed talking about the topic.

Gemma

Gemma is a 24 year old English speaking white woman and a marketing manager. She was single at the time of the interview and living with her parents. I made contact with Gemma through snowball sampling where a previous participant told her about the study. We conducted the interview at a restaurant and it lasted approximately two hours. Gemma presented as enthusiastic and warm. She treated her experiences with a lot of humour and I found that I was often laughing during the interview. I appreciated her warm and easy-going approach and enjoyed the interview.

Phindile

Phindile is a 23 year old English/Swati speaking black woman and was finishing her law degree at the time of the interview. She was single and shared a house with two friends. The interview took place at Phindile's home in the evening and lasted an hour and a half. I enjoyed the interview immensely as she had clear opinions on the research topic. Phindile's views on gender and her thoughtful resistance to dominant expectations of traditional femininity challenged me and left me thinking about the interview for days afterwards. She apologised a number of times during the interview for not expressing herself clearly, but I experienced her as articulate and thought that she spoke about her views with a poetic quality.

Sonia

Sonia is a 22 year old Afrikaans speaking white woman and a postgraduate university student. At the time of the interview she was single and living with a friend. The interview took place over lunch at a

restaurant and lasted three and a half hours. Sonia and I have known each other superficially for a number of years and upon hearing about my study she indicated that she was interested in participating. I enjoyed the interview as Sonia spoke with passion and shared her experiences very openly. I felt that I identified strongly with Sonia's experiences and we shared a similar view on matters around sexuality and gender; I often felt as if I had to "hold back" during the interview to avoid engaging in a more conversational manner where I reciprocated with my own views. I wanted to maintain the focus on her in order to explore how her views were not only similar to mine, but also how they differed. The interview lasted longer than anticipated but I had the impression that Sonia appreciated the opportunity to speak openly about her sexuality as she indicated that she did not have many opportunities to do so.

Nasiphi

Nasiphi is a 21 year old English/Pedi speaking black woman and was single at the time of the interview. She was identified as a participant through snowball sampling where a previous participant introduced us. The interview took place at a pub in the early afternoon and lasted just under two hours. Nasiphi was initially hesitant to participate, as she was concerned about the interview questions being "too personal". I explained the focus of the study and the type of questions I would like to ask, and also emphasised that she could choose to not respond to questions if she found them intrusive or uncomfortable. After providing more information she said that she felt comfortable participating. During the interview I was mindful to remind her again that she did not have to answer questions that made her uncomfortable. I felt nervous during this interview, perhaps because I was aware of her initial reservations to participate. The interview was somewhat stilted at the beginning, but after a while I started to relax and Nasiphi also appeared more comfortable.

6.3 The discourse analysis

My broad focus in analysing the interview texts was on how bisexuality is constructed as a discursive object in the talk of participants. I was particularly interested in how the various constructions of bisexuality that were drawn on in the text function, which I explored through considering the different ways in which they position participants and impact on their subjectivity. In addition to this broad focus I also focused on how gendered subjectivity intersects with participants' identity as bisexual. During the analysis I paid particular attention to variations in the discursive positions occupied by participants. Poststructuralist theory regards the subject as constituted through discursive practices and as occupying varied and at times contradictory positions (Henriques et al.,

1984). This is evident in the analysis where participants often assume complex and contradictory positions in negotiating their identities as bisexual.

I decided against the academic convention of separating the presentation of the analysis from a discussion of the findings. Instead I present an integrated account of the discourses identified during the analysis and my discussion of these discourses in this and the subsequent chapter. My motivation for this is that in discourse analytic work it can be difficult to present the findings without commenting on the implications of discourses or contrasting the discourses with other discourses circulating outside the text (such as discourses in academic literature or in popular media). Willig (2008) argues for the value of merging analysis and discussion sections in discourse analytic research, stating that “a meaningful presentation of the analysis of data can only really take place within the context of a discussion of the insights generated by the analysis” (p. 103). Morison (2011), Mama (1995) and Potgieter (1997) use a similar approach where they integrate the analysis and discussion of their research.

I discuss the findings through presenting the discourses identified in the interview texts in a framework of eight groupings or clusters of discourses. This structure was to some extent influenced by the literature I reviewed. Bower et al. (2002) discuss their findings according to a framework that includes three components - the cultural unintelligibility of bisexuality, delegitimising discourses and normalising discourses. I found that during the analysis, aspects of this framework also applied to the findings in the current study, in that the discourses identified seemed to cohere along a similar structure. However, I also found that some of the features identified as forming part of the components of the framework by Bower et al. (2002) were not reflected in my findings. Further to this, I identified additional components that were not present in the framework proposed by Bower et al. (2002). This is due in part to these authors posing different questions to their data – they did not, for example, include a specific focus on gendered subjectivity. The framework used here is then only partly informed by that of Bower et al. (2002).

I acknowledge that there are many other ways of organising the data as my reading of the interview texts was informed by my own subjective positioning in discourse and the particular research questions I posed. During the analysis I was also mindful to avoid “forcing” the data to fit into a specific framework. I adapted the framework, as well as the individual discourses, continuously throughout the analysis as different (and sometimes contradictory) insights arose. The eight main

groupings, as well as the various discourses subsumed under each grouping, are outlined in the table below.

Table 2: Analytical framework

Chapter 6: Navigating gendered difference and (hetero)sexualised subjectivity	
Discursive groupings	Discourses subsumed under each grouping
Sexuality as identity	“And then the last thing is that you’re bi”: The intersectionality of identity
	Post-apartheid South Africa and a resistance to identity politics
Discourses of gendered difference	“Gender is a random criterion for me”: Rejecting gendered difference
	Romantic androgyny: Attraction to a person, not a gender
	“I have to give him a chance to be a man”: Relationships with men as gendered
	“It’s easier to free-style with a woman”: Relationships with women as sites of resistance
Bisexuality and a butch/femme dichotomy	Heterosexism and the traditional female beauty ideal
	The constitutive outside: Evoking the butch dyke
	“People will judge you”: Policing the boundaries around butch and femme
Heteronormativity and bisexuality	“You have this image ready-made”: Marriage and family discourse as familiar
	“You’re always up against a husband and children”: Bisexuality as competing with marriage and family discourse
	“It isn’t any kind of option for having a good life”: Bisexuality as incompatible with marriage and family discourse
	“Family is important to me”: Rearticulating marriage and family discourse

Chapter 7: Dismissal, delegitimation and re-appropriation of bisexuality	
Discursive groupings	Discourses subsumed under each grouping
The unintelligibility of bisexuality	An inability to construe sexual desire as “going both ways”
	“Was that a phase?” Bisexuality as indecision
	The incitement to choose
Delegitimising discourses	The hot-bi-babe: Bisexuality as an eroticised heterosexual male fantasy
	“You’ve gotta have both”: Bisexuality as equated with promiscuity
Silencing discourses	Same-sex sexuality as un-African
	Same-sex sexuality as sin
Normalising discourses	“A little bit of bisexuality exists in all of us”: Claiming a universal bisexual potential
	“I don’t think it’s a choice”: Bisexuality as biologically predetermined

6.4 Sexuality as identity

In this first section I focus on how participants engage with a discourse of sexuality as identity. While many of the participants construct their sexuality as not being central to their identity, the discursive context in which they manage their identity is one in which sexuality, and particularly non-heterosexual sexualities, is privileged as denoting something about who they are as a person. Such an essentialist construction views sexuality in terms of different sexual “types”, where a person’s sexual identification is considered as revealing a set of characteristics that defines them (Hicks, 2007). Hicks (2008) emphasises that such fixing of sexuality as defining one’s identity occurs mostly in relation to gay, lesbian and bisexual individuals. Heterosexuality, in contexts where it is the norm, escapes such fixing of identity as it is taken for granted and not noticed as something that is worthy of comment. Instead, homosexual and bisexual individuals are more often reduced to their sexuality through statements such as “she is bisexual so she must be...” (Hicks, 2007). Such references

become categorical statements about sexual types that cement into place specific characteristics associated with the individual in question.

In the discussion that follows I describe two main ways in which participants engaged with a discourse of sexuality as identity. Firstly, participants assumed resistant positions where they challenged such discursive fixing of their identities. Secondly, participants drew on notions of post-apartheid resistance to identity categories in support of their resistance.

6.4.1 “And then the last thing is that you’re bi”: The intersectionality of identity

Participants drew on a discourse of the intersectionality of identity, in resisting a discursive fixing of their identity according to their sexual orientation. Participants referred to a discourse of sexuality as identity as restrictive. Sonia described this as others discursively reducing her identity to her sexuality through references to “that girl who is bisexual”. In that way, her identity as bisexual becomes primary and all other references to her are filtered through a focus on her sexual orientation. Such a discourse of sexuality as identity is constructed by participants as a barrier to disclosing their sexual identification as bisexual. In coming out to others, they fear that they will be seen as different and that their identity, as constructed by others, will change. Belinda refers to her fear that some of her friends will not see her in the same way if she had to come out to them as bisexual:

My concern is that if I came out a lot more openly to some of my friends, that it would somehow change the friendship. That is a concern. That somehow they’ll see me as different than who I am. But I’m still me. It’s just who I am attracted to at that stage, you know.

Participants generally resisted a discourse of sexuality as identity as they did not consider their sexuality as being central to their construction of who they are. Participants spoke about other signifiers of identity as more comfortably describing their identity. In such a construction the self is construed as comprising of numerous strands of identity. Multiple categories of identity contribute to identity and sexuality is but one aspect - one that is generally downplayed by participants. This intersectionality of identity contributes to what Phindile describes as a sense of being “a whole human” and not a “sexual being with an element of humanness”. She elaborates on this in the following way:

People get offended that I don’t define myself by my race, or my culture, whatever, my sexuality. I don’t use those as barometers to measure myself, of my self-worth, or anything

like that.... Like, I am female, I'm black, I'm South African, all those things are equally important.

Participants also drew on a construction of bisexuality as a preference to minimise the contribution that sexuality makes to identity. They did not consider sexuality to be void of meaning, but constructed their attraction to men and women as one of many nuances of their identity, just like any other inclinations they might have. Within this construction, bisexuality is given less weight. It is regarded as significant but not as something that should change how others view them. Laetitia and Phindile refer to this when they state the following:

Laetitia: Some people like coffee and other people drink green tea all day and other people just like water. Understand, for me it's just like another choice - it's a preference.

Phindile: I don't like broccoli, but I'm not going to hold a press conference about it.

In the above comments participants use what can be described as trivial examples, in order to show up how arbitrary they consider a focus on sexuality as identity to be.

The salience of a discourse of sexuality as identity places participants in a position where they have to manage their identity in a way that does not reinforce other's positioning of their bisexuality as primary to their identity. This is described as having to put in work to avoid others seeing them as bisexual only. Sonia speaks about this as a constant process of weighing up what she can and cannot share in every context in which she finds herself. She states: "It's incredibly tricky, and that's why I'm saying that it's almost like this kind of skill just to function as someone who is not straight". This identity work is enacted in different ways. Participants referred to delaying identifying themselves as bisexual in order for people to construct meaning around who they are without drawing on their sexual orientation as a reference point for all the other strands of their identity:

Sibongile: It's not like when I first meet a person I say 'hey', you know. They get used to me the person first, and they get to like that person so when eventually it does come out it's almost like 'okay, I really like you so that doesn't matter. You haven't changed as a person, you're still very loud and talkative and bubbly', you know.

Gemma refers to another strategy to downplay her sexuality, through presenting herself as vibrant and engaging enough to "overshadow" the knowledge of her bisexuality in others' construction of

her identity. She describes how she has to overcompensate to ensure that others remember her for her “personality” and not as “the bisexual”:

But my whole thing is that your personality should carry you through life, not who you choose to date. It shouldn't be an issue. If you have a personality, if you have a presence if you walk into a room, people know you as this person who works in this industry, or as a nice best friend or whatever. And then the last thing is that you're bi.

Managing their identity in this manner – deemphasising their sexuality – is seen by participants as contributing to a discursive context in which sexuality becomes less salient in constructing identity. It functions as an act of resistance in a context marked by a heteronormative incitement to categorise gay, lesbian and bisexual individuals as “types of people”. In this way, it contributes to transforming the discursive context to one where sexuality is given less importance. Taryn refers to this when, speaking about different categories of sexual orientation, she states: “I just think that all these questions and categories, that hopefully at some point we will let go of all of them”.

From the discussion so far it appears that participants resist identifying as bisexual in contexts where their sexuality will be assigned primacy in constructing their identity. However, identifying as bisexual was considered as less likely to fix their identity in relation to their sexuality than identifying as lesbian would. Many of the participants initially identified themselves as lesbian, based on their feelings of attraction to or intimate encounters with women. Participants described how over time they grew uncomfortable with a lesbian identity and presented as bisexual instead. This was partly related to a desire for specificity in sexual identification. Identifying as lesbian excludes a part of their lived reality – the fact that they are open to dating men as well as women. However, it was also related to a resistance to the clearly defined and regulated identity they associate with the signifier lesbian.

Sibongile refers to identifying as lesbian as “another form of imprisonment”, with a set of discursive acts that should be performed to support one's homosexuality. Compared to bisexuality, homosexuality has a longer history of essentialist treatment as a “type” of person with certain identifiable characteristics (Plummer, 1998). Identifying as lesbian is then not considered as freeing up one's available subject positions in dominant discourse. Instead, participants regard it as trading the fixed position of heterosexuality for yet another fixed position within a discourse of homosexual

identity. Sibongile described this by stating that “you are now subscribing to another world”. She goes on to say the following:

And you find everyone acting the same (in gay and lesbian spaces)... When you're in a space like that I think you are unconsciously trying to align who you are and how you do things, how you speak and how you walk, to everyone else, so that you fit in. So we're still trying to fit in, in a sense.

Perhaps because of the general marginalisation of bisexuality, there is not yet a clearly defined construction of what the term bisexual means. It is therefore somewhat easier to assume a more flexible identity. While homosexuality is constructed as rule-bound, bisexuality, in contrast, is constructed as open and less strictly defined. Here bisexuality functions as resisting the fixing of identity associated with “lesbian” or “straight”.

This downplaying of their sexuality in construing identity can be better understood when considering the context in which participants are managing their identity. The next discourse relates to how race is treated in relation to identity in South Africa and the implications of this for participants' constructions of their sexuality.

6.4.2 Post-apartheid South Africa and a resistance to identity politics

A history of oppressive treatment along socially constructed lines of difference in South Africa has contributed to participants' rejection of such categories. In South Africa, race and political discourses around its construction remain influential in policing strict boundaries around identity. Participants were critical of such fixing of identity in terms of race and extended this critical view to their own treatment of their sexuality. Phindile refers to how race functions as a marker of identity in prescribing certain behaviours as “black” behaviour and “white” behaviour. She describes how, as a black South African, she is expected to value her racial identity and act in ways that support it. In the following statement she refers to a conversation she had with her mother when she was a young child:

My mom said to me, she was getting very frustrated with me and my brother, and she said ‘why are you acting so white?’ I can't remember what we were doing, we were doing something wrong, something not socially accepted in black circles.

Phindile's statement highlights the performative character of identity, where certain discursive acts contribute to the construction of blackness, described by her as "having black thoughts, doing black things, speaking in a black way". Being black is construed as significant and one has to perform one's blackness continuously. For Phindile, moving in "white" spaces reinforced the notion that race was important. At a predominantly white school she had to downplay her blackness to fit into the "white world", where blackness was considered a threat to the white norm. Transitioning between these different discursive contexts, heavily marked by constructions of race as being a significant category of identity, sensitised her to the effects of strictly defined categories:

Phindile: So I think at some point you just stop fighting, you just stop seeing the importance of it, because it's really draining to keep... I don't know, it was a constant struggle I guess. And at the end of it I was like it's really not worth it. Race is not that important. It's important in so far as how long it takes until I get sunburnt, kind of thing (laughs).

In a similar way, other participants recounted the impact of transitioning between different cultural contexts. In conservative spaces in Afrikaner culture, such as during their schooling, white participants found themselves in discursive contexts marked by the racialised ideology of apartheid. In participants' accounts, this oppressive ideology was associated with constructing rigid lines of difference and assigning people to categories based on those lines of difference. Astrid describes this as a sense of being "indoctrinated" into a certain "school of thought". In such contexts, notions of identity that fell outside of the nationalist heteronormative apartheid agenda were depicted as other. It is in relation to this political discourse that participants consider strictly defined categories of identity to be oppressive.

Contrasted to this were contexts where participants could question the effects of strictly circumscribed categories of identity. Taryn refers to growing up in South Africa, where at that time one of the most vociferously policed constructions in apartheid South Africa was the prohibition of what was then termed miscegenation (Posel, 2004). Constructions of race and gender as naturalised were used as strategies during apartheid to preserve the (white) heterosexual nuclear family (Kaufman, 2000). Constructing racial differences as biological boundaries that should not be tampered with ensured the preservation of a "pure" white race. Taryn contrasts this with her experience of attending high school at an international school overseas where her first boyfriend was black:

There the race thing was not an issue. My first boyfriend was a black guy, and it was just way more liberal in that sense.

Forming part of a discursive community where race was not treated in the same manner as in apartheid discourses, created a space in which to question the essentialised treatment of categories of identity for participants. If socially constructed boundaries around race can be stepped outside of, then other socially constructed differences such as gender and the heterosexual norm can also be questioned. Taryn comments on how sexuality, similar to other strictly defined categories of identity, function in support of oppressive ideology:

I think until we learn to let go of our discrimination and the things we hold on to in terms of identity, we'll never move forward as a race. We'll continue to fight and find reasons to fight. And sexuality is just another aspect of that.

Participants' disavowal of strictly defined categories of identity and their reluctance to privilege their sexual orientation as primary to their identity, is then to a large extent informed by their political positioning. In post-apartheid South Africa, participants consider rigid boundaries along socially constructed differences, such as race and sexuality, as oppressive.

In this section I discussed discourses that relate to how participants engage with a discourse of sexuality as identity. Participants generally resisted a construction where their sexual orientation is given primacy in defining their identity, through drawing on a counter-discourse of the intersectionality of identity. Such resistance to fixing their identity along strictly defined categories of identity was to a large extent informed by their political resistance to reified categories of identity. In the following section I shift the focus of the analysis to intersections between gender and sexuality.

6.5 Discourses of gendered difference

In this section I present various discourses that relate to how participants make sense of gender in relation to their sexuality. Despite a number of authors commenting on the potential of bisexuality to disrupt the traditional gender binary through a refusal to orientate to one gender only (such as Däumer, 1992; Garber, 2000; Sedgwick, 1990) there is a lack of literature exploring how gender is constructed in the accounts of bisexual women. A monosexual configuration of sexuality posits that sexual desire is directed at *either* men *or* women. Bisexuality confounds this binary through resisting a choice between these oppositional categories (Däumer, 1992). At the same time, a poststructuralist approach warns that it is not possible to entirely escape binary logic since any term that attempts to disrupt a dominant binary would necessarily draw on the binary in defining itself as resistant (Derrida, 1976). Bisexuality then relies on the monosexual and gender binaries for its

meaning, even in attempting to transgress these binaries (Namaste, 1994). It is then possible that bisexual discourse can at times unsettle the traditional gender binary, but might also in some instances act in support of the binary.

Guiding questions for this section of the analysis included exploring how bisexual women construct gender and how they treat maleness and femaleness when talking about relationships with either men or women. The analysis indicates that participants assume varying, and at times contradicting positions in relation to gender. Throughout the presentation of the findings, I consider how binary constructions of gender are negotiated and potentially disrupted in participants' accounts.

6.5.1 "Gender is a random criterion for me": Rejecting gendered difference

The first position identified in the text, in participants' engagement with gendered discourses, is one in which gender is constructed as an arbitrary signifier of identity, much like any other physical differentiation between people. Dominant discourse assigns particular qualities to individuals based on their gender. Such a discourse of gendered difference is based on normative regulatory practices that support the dominant male/female binary and marginalise other gendered identities (McIlvenny, 2002). Through a discourse of gendered difference, men and women are positioned as categorically different and similarities between these two genders are downplayed (West & Zimmerman, 1992). Further to this, the oppositional but complementary configuration of the gender binary posits heterosexual attraction as normal and natural (Butler, 1990). This first position assumed by participants, is one in which they are critical of such a discourse of gendered difference. Grouping people according to gender is considered as erasing other differences between people and for participants, attraction to someone based on their assignment to one of these groups is constructed as nonsensical. In this sense, participants show up the vulnerability of gender as a social construct by stripping it of its discursive power. Phindile describes this as follows:

I don't think that often people are attracted to a group. For instance, it's very rare to find someone who says 'well, I'm attracted to people with long toes', or whatever. I understand why they would locate it in gender, cause it's such an easy thing, if you think of reproduction. But for someone like myself, reproduction plays absolutely no role in choosing who I want to be with. So gender then is a random criterion for me.

Participants reject gender as a basis for sexual attraction and do not regard it as informing their choice in partners. Phindile constructs gender differences as "random" and equates the notion of gender as informing sexual attraction to basing attraction on a quality such as people having "long

toes”; in this way she posits a discourse of gendered difference as absurd. Phindile’s reference to reproduction as informing gender as the basis for sexual attraction points to the above-mentioned construction of gender as oppositional and complimentary – in a discourse of gendered difference men and women are constructed as binary opposites and as supplementing each other in what the other lacks (Butler, 1990). Such a configuration clearly implicates heterosexuality as regulating gender differences, in what Butler (1990) describes as the heterosexual matrix. In drawing on such heterosexual complementarity of male and female bodies, gender differences are naturalised (Butler, 1990). Phindile however distances herself from this “logic” of gender differences by stating that for her, “reproduction plays absolutely no role in choosing who [she] want[s] to be with”. In this manner, her account of gender differences as absurd and arbitrary remains unchallenged by dominant discourse.

Taryn similarly positions herself as critical of a discourse of gendered difference as informing sexual attraction:

I feel like I’m a being who goes through life and meets and attaches with certain people for reasons that I might not even know or understand. And sexuality and gender being like the very last considerations in that. I feel like it’s part of our journey to experience certain people and experience relationships with certain people, because we need to learn. There are reasons behind it, which go much further than gender.

In rejecting a discourse of gendered difference, participants question why gender is considered a significant marker of identity and as informing the structure of social life. In their statements they regard gender as having been assigned disproportionate meaning in dominant discourses in society. Assigning individuals as male and female, and the subsequent positioning of individuals within gendered discourses, becomes a socially constructed process that participants consider to be arbitrary. Participants question the utility of the categories male and female with Phindile and Nasiphi noting:

Phindile: Maybe I’m being more and more radical in my approach, but I realise that I don’t see, other than roles and for control, why there needs to be a distinct separation (between male and female).

Nasiphi: I really just want to rather have a box of ‘people’ and not ‘male’ and ‘female’. If I even have to have a box at all...

Participants relate their dissatisfaction with categories of gender to the manner in which such categories are used in dominant discourse. They are critical of the patriarchal organisation of the gender binary, where a discourse of gendered difference privileges male over female. Phindile comments on this when discussing how gendered positioning of women often function to position women as inferior to men:

I mean, why must the man be the head of the house? I know a whole range of women who would do a better job leading, than men. So it just doesn't make any sense. But I guess I understand why it's like that – because it's easier, it's convenient, especially for men, etcetera. But ja, I just don't agree with it.

Phindile goes on to explain that she feels constrained by the incitement of dominant discourse to act and feel in certain ways because of her own gendered positioning:

It's one of the most frustrating things... I don't understand, in fact I do understand, I just don't agree, I don't agree with structuring our society strictly down gender lines. I think it's really silly, to be quite honest, but it's also very frustrating. It's like 'you're a girl, girls do this'. And I've had a problem with that my whole life... I mean what about my being a girl compels me to wash the dishes? Or why can't I run around outside?

In the above two excerpts Phindile makes references to how a discourse of gendered difference assigns men and women to discrete categories and prescribes different sets of normative practices in support of these categories. This constrains the range of actions available to participants. Cara expresses her irritation with structured gendered identities and practices in that she wants to be able to move between "male" and "female" practices without censure. She constructs this as a sense of frustration at being restricted in the range of behaviours she can engage in because certain practices are not regarded as "feminine":

I know many men have told me that I am intimidating, or exes have told me that it's difficult to approach me. But it's not about me looking like I am going to hit them or something, it's just that I am perhaps the one who fixes the light bulb. See, it's stupid to me because I can, it's not like women are pathetic. I have met women in my life who have literally built their own houses, why do we have to be subordinate? I am by now so completely over that whole thing of 'man' and 'woman'. I don't know, maybe I will morph into a single cell organism one of these days.

In ^{the} above excerpt Cara indicates an awareness of the manner in which gendered subjectivities are often employed in ways that disempower women when she states "it's not like women are

pathetic” and poses the question “why do we have to be subordinate?” This criticism of the gender binary is however almost apologetic. Phindile refers to her unease with patriarchal constructions of gender as a “radical” view, and later in the interview when speaking about not wanting to get married, defends herself from sounding like a “washed-out feminist”. Assuming a feminist position is regarded as something that others will see as unreasonable or extreme, and that one should preempt such criticism through statements that distance one from such a position. Cara, in her earlier statement about morphing “into a single cell organism” is also positioning her view as extreme and as one that is so radical that it is not generally accepted by others. She compares her desire to eliminate gender categories and the incitement to act in support of such categories to existing as the least differentiated form of life. In this way, her position is depicted as so extreme that it is unsustainable. In a sense this reinforces how firmly entrenched gender is in dominant discourse – in that participants consider their resistance to dominant discourse as so radical that it is almost untenable.

6.5.2 Romantic androgyny: Attraction to a person, not a gender

Instead of structuring their sexual desire along gendered lines, participants draw on a construction of attraction to a person, and not to a gender. This echoes the description offered by Kitzinger (1987), where she refers to bisexual women as describing their same-sex and opposite sex desire as being about the person they fall in love with, and not as a response to a particular gender. Kitzinger and Stainton Rogers (1985, p. 182) refer to such a “person and not a gender” construction as “romantic androgyny” where attraction is not linked to gender. Participants’ use of such a construction of romantic androgyny is in part a legitimising move, in that participants construe their attraction as less restricted than that of heterosexual or homosexual individuals. Astrid refers to such a view of bisexuals as less restricted in their focus on gender and bodies than monosexuals when she says the following:

It’s quite crazy for me, but I guess it’s not like I look down upon gay people, but for me, I also don’t get that. I don’t get how anyone can say ‘I will never love these people, over here. These people with penises or those people with vaginas’. It’s like, wow, is that all you see? There’s a mind in that body and there’s a soul in that body, you know.

In constructing bisexuality in this manner, it is positioned as privileged over monosexualities, as bisexuals view attraction as transcending gender categories, while monosexuals are construed as limited in their focus on the gender of the person they are attracted to. As discussed in the literature review (in Chapter 4), evoking a bisexuality/monosexuality binary functions to normalise bisexuality

as unrestricted in object choice, while monosexualities are pathologised through an association with a rigid preference for only one gender (Ault, 1996). Within this construction, bisexuality is then constructed as being about more than sexuality - it is considered as part of a resistance to strictly defined categories of identity such as gender. In a reconfiguration of the heterosexual/homosexual binary, bisexuality is privileged over monosexuality (Ault, 1996). Monosexuals are reduced to a sexual or physical interest in either “penises or vaginas” while bisexuals are constructed as having a deeper interest that cannot be reduced to material bodies.

A consequence of such a legitimising move is that it reverts to employing yet another sexual dualism, where monosexualities are marginalised and positioned as the other (Ault, 1996; Bower et al., 2002). By collapsing homosexuality and heterosexuality under the category monosexualities, participants deny the specificity of gay, lesbian and straight sexualities, a discursive move that assigns these categories “to a common margin, establishing the bisexual as legitimate, normal, and central against a newly constructed and now stigmatised collective other, the monosexual” (Ault, 1996, p. 459). In this manner monosexuality becomes the abject other to bisexuality (Butler, 1990).

It can be noted at this point that participants’ accounts thus far, where they assume positions that are critical of a discourse of gendered difference, indicate some slippage between “gender” and “biological sex”. There are several instances in which participants use the term “gender” when referring to classification as male or female based on physiological characteristics, such as when Astrid refers to gendered attraction as based on “penises and vaginas” or when Phindile equates classification based on gender to grouping people according to the length of their toes. In drawing on references to physiological differentiation, participants conflate gender with biological sex and it can be argued that their rejection of gendered difference is really a rejection of biological sex.

Of course, rejecting the notion of biological sex as informing identity and directing sexual attraction certainly challenges dominant discourses that link sex, gender and sexuality (Butler, 1990). If biological sex no longer directs attraction then the automatic coupling of these constructs in the heterosexual matrix is unsettled. However, rejecting biological sex does not necessarily disrupt the salience of gender in positioning subjects along a male/female binary. In dismissing identification as male or female as informing their attraction to a person (through aligning themselves with a position of romantic androgyny) participants are not escaping the fact that they and their partners *are* gendered. They deny the importance of partners’ having either “penises or vaginas” and in that way reject the notion of reducing one’s attraction to only one gender, but such an account is still

oriented to *two* genders – a naturalised male (men with penises) and naturalised female (women with vaginas)¹¹.

I return to this point in the final chapter, when I consider the extent to which bisexuality functions as a challenge to the gender binary.

6.5.3 “I have to give him a chance to be a man”: Relationships with men as gendered

A further position assumed by participants, in engaging with gendered discourses, is one in which relationships are constructed as gendered. In the previous section participants clearly distance themselves from gender (or sex) differences as wielding any influence in their positioning within dominant discourse. Participants reject the influence of assignment as male or female in structuring sexual desire or romantic connections with others. However, participants also draw on a different construction – one where gender is constructed as impacting greatly on the manner in which participants interact with either male or female partners, and how they perform their own gendered identity in relation to their relationship being either same-sex or opposite sex:

Sonia: I'm very aware of the gender; I just don't always care what it is. I mean because of it your relationship with either guys or girls is different, sexual development is different, emotional development is different, commitment is different, it's different. So it's not the same for me in dating the one or the other.

Participants describe their relationships with men as structured along gendered lines to a greater extent than their relationships with women. They draw on a construction of traditional masculinity when discussing their gendered positioning in relationships with men. Here masculinity is constructed as men being in control, as having more power in the relationship, and as being positioned as the provider and protector in the relationship. This resonates with constructions of normative or hegemonic masculinities cited in literature (e.g. Mosse, 1996; Ratele, 2006). Participants relate such a construction of hegemonic masculinity to them feeling compelled to act in ways that support the performance of this version of masculinity when in a relationship with a man:

Sonia: With guys I often also have to be careful... it sounds weird but I have to be more feminine. I should sometimes give him a chance to be a man.

¹¹ Some theorists of bisexuality have responded to critiques of bisexuality as transphobic (in orienting to an attraction to men and women only, effectively erasing non-binary sexes and genders) by describing bisexuality as an attraction to *more than one* sex or gender, instead of an attraction to *both* genders (such as Ochs, 2007).

Taryn: My previous boyfriend was very chauvinistic. And I was so aware that I was playing into it and changing my own personality to accommodate his insecurities as a man.

Phindile: With guys, I guess it's not just us in the relationship.... Perhaps it's the roles that I have myself associated with girl-guy relationships, that I play into, or I try to resist... I definitely feel that pressure more with guys, I'm just not sure why.

Participants refer to the gendered positioning associated with a relationship with a man as limiting because it invites them (as women) to assume a traditional female subjectivity. Such a traditional construction of female subjectivity entails assuming a deferring role in relation to men and exhibiting passivity and helplessness (Crawford & Unger, 2000). It requires the relinquishing of women's agency in order to bolster a construction of male authority and competency. In this manner, the traditional male/female binary compels participants to perform their femininity in ways that support their partner's masculinity and they see this as a betrayal of who they are and how they would prefer to act. This points to how the terms in the traditional gender binary seemingly function as complete and independent, but are instead reliant on each other for meaning (Derrida, 1976).

6.5.4 "It's easier to free-style with a woman": Relationships with women as sites of resistance

In contrast to how relationships with men are constructed, participants construct relationships with women as entailing greater flexibility regarding gendered positions in the relationship. Same-sex relationships are constructed as allowing for a form of resistance to traditionally structured gendered relationships. Unlike the firmly entrenched normative relationship model of heterosexuality, same-sex relationships do not entail such a well-developed construction of gendered interaction or subjectivity. Because a same-sex relationship defies what is prescribed by dominant discourse, it allows for the creation of participants' own "rules" where they can "make it up" as they go along, instead of having to act out a strictly defined gendered subjectivity that is imposed on them:

Astrid: With women it's just easier because there aren't pre-defined roles. I usually tell people that it's more fun. It's more fun for me to figure out who's good at what.

Sibongile: As much as I'm attracted to both males and females, I see myself settling down with a female rather than a male. I just think settling with a guy comes with all these boxes almost, because

of how things should be. With a woman there's nothing to break down. Between the two of you, you just establish how you guys are gonna make things work and how you relate.

Sibongile goes on to describe a relationship with a woman as playful and free, contrasted to a relationship with a man as more rigidly structured:

I think most of the time you find that straight guys are generally in that mind-set. You know what I mean, like this is my role and, so I don't know. I don't think... I don't want to do that. I'm not a rigid person in that sense, I just like free-styling as I go on. And I think it's easier to free-style with a woman because there aren't any set ways of doing things, you know...

Similar to many lesbian women, participants construct their same-sex relationships as free from gender-specific roles and as more egalitarian (Riggle, Whitman, Olson, Rostosky, & Strong, 2008). In blurring the strict allocation of gendered roles in their same-sex relationships, participants trouble the heterosexual organisation of the gender binary. The assumed asymmetry between men and women evident in the heterosexual organisation of the gender binary, and the subsequent hierarchy that follows from this, becomes irrelevant in their same-sex relationship and participants can adopt a playful approach to their gendered interaction with their partner (Delphy, 1993).

In summary, participants' gendering of relationships denotes an awareness of the fact that they do exist in discursive communities where gender *is* salient. In dominant discourse masculinity and femininity are constructed in particular ways and assigned meaning in relationships. This is especially the case for the gendered interaction that is normalised in heterosexual relationships. When in a relationship with a man, participants are "unable" to resist the incitement of heterosexual discourse to act in ways that support traditional notions of masculinity and femininity. In this manner gender and sexuality are performed in relation to the regulative discourse of heterosexuality that prescribes what is considered as acceptable acts in support of the coherence of the category female. Even in identifying as bisexual, and resisting gender as a social marker or as the basis of sexual attraction, the powerful influence of heteronormativity cannot be entirely escaped when in a relationship with a man. Relationships with women then become sites of resistance where traditional female subjectivity can be rearticulated and the gendered interaction in a relationship can be questioned.

I now turn to a discussion of participants' treatment of their own gendered identity as it intersects with their identification as bisexual.

6.6 Bisexuality and a butch/femme dichotomy

In this section of the analysis I focus on how participants construct their gendered identity as women in relation to their identification as bisexual. To this end I explore how participants treat notions of femininity in their talk about sexuality and sexual identities. One of the main ways in which participants refer to femininity and sexuality during the interviews is through reflecting on a butch/femme dichotomy, with bisexual women generally described as “femme” and lesbian women described as “butch”. I first describe how participants draw on traditional beauty ideals in constructing a femme identity, followed by a discussion of their evocation of the “butch dyke” in support of their own identity as femme. Finally, I discuss the functions of evoking the butch dyke, as it occurs in participants’ talk.

6.6.1 Heterosexism and the traditional female beauty ideal

Many of the participants describe themselves as tomboys and mostly distance themselves from patriarchal heteronormative constructions of femininity. For example, Sonia describes herself as always having been “a real tomboy” and Phindile, in talking about her frustration with fixed gender roles, states “I’ve had a problem with that my whole life because... I guess I’m a tomboy”. In aligning themselves with a construction of a tomboy, participants position themselves as different from widely prescribed female gendered norms. However, in their gendered presentation participants appear to conform to a traditional beauty ideal and also express this in their own reflection on their gendered and sexualised identities - they consider themselves as visually presenting as “conventionally” feminine (Nadia). The traditional female beauty ideal, as a socially constructed normative standard to which women are expected to conform, has been described as interwoven with heterosexuality. Enacting an appropriate gendered identity entails conforming to what is regarded not only as a viable woman, but also a viable “heterosexual woman” (Rich, 1980, p. 642, emphasis in original). In this manner, “messages about femininity and heterosexuality become imprinted upon the female body in the form of the cultural ideal of female beauty” (Pitman, 1999, p. 134). In constructing their identities as femme, Jennifer and Nadia draw on such a beauty ideal when reflecting on their appearance:

Jennifer: A lot of people that I know, if I say that (I am) bisexual then they look at me strangely. Because I wear a dress, I have long hair, I wear makeup, and you know I have long nails, it doesn’t make sense.

Nadia: If you didn't know me at all, you didn't know my background and you weren't asking me these things, and you see me with a man, you would have thought 'this chick is straight', because I don't look like a dyke. I don't look like I've even been with a chick.

Through references that link their visual presentation with their appearance as "straight", participants reinforce the heterosexist assumption of traditional female beauty ideals. In the above excerpt, Nadia emphasises this when she says that based on her appearance, I would have thought, "this chick is straight". Jennifer also describes her sexual identification as surprising to others, based on her visual presentation as femme, when she states that she is met with disbelief when she discloses as bisexual. This notion of bisexual women visually "passing" as straight is supported by Clarke and Turner (2007), who note that bisexual visual identities generally do not appear to be rigidly bound to lesbian/gay appearance norms. This is in contrast with lesbian and gay individuals expressing that their way of dress and visual presentation centre on lesbian/gay appearance norms (Clarke & Turner, 2007). Taub (2003) in turn describes how some bisexual women adopt aspects of lesbian appearance norms through dressing and styling themselves in ways that are more consistent with a stereotypically lesbian image. It seems that participants in the current study however do not readily integrate aspects of lesbian appearance norms. Instead, in aligning themselves with a femme identity, participants construct a visual presentation that supports the enmeshment of heterosexuality with traditional female beauty ideals.

6.6.2 The constitutive outside: Evoking the butch dyke

Participants' own gendered identity as femme is contrasted in the interviews with references to lesbian women as butch. Participants referred to lesbian women who do not conform to traditional notions of femininity as "hardcore dykes" or "butch dykes". The butch dyke is constructed through different discursive practices that are considered transgressive of the traditional female beauty ideal. Participants describe these practices as dressing and walking "like a man", having short hair, having piercings and presenting an "unkempt" image, echoing stereotypical constructions of a butch identity in dominant discourses (Eves, 2004). Drawing on a construction of the butch dyke creates a butch/femme dichotomy where bisexuality is privileged as supporting a femme gender identity, while a lesbian identity is marginalised as supporting a non-traditional butch gender identity. In this manner, the butch dyke supports participants' identities as femme through functioning as the constitutive outside to the gender norm (Butler, 1993a).

Drawing on the discursive contribution of bodies to the performance of gender, participants' talk serves to naturalise gender. The manner in which men and women discursively perform their gender

becomes rooted in physical and bodily cues that are “supposed” to reflect one’s biological sex. The butch/femme dichotomy constructs women who defy this “fit” between gender and physical bodies by adopting a more masculine presentation, as transgressing an almost sacred natural order. Such a naturalised construction does not allow for an awareness of how feminine and masculine presentations are socially constructed – instead women who present a butch identity are seen as appropriating something that “naturally” belongs to men. Gemma refers to this when she describes butch lesbian women in the following way:

It’s like a façade, like using this man exterior to hide a deep hurt inside of you.... It’s like they hate being a woman so much.

Sibongile similarly describes lesbian women as rejecting their femininity:

I love the aspects of my femininity. I don’t want to be a man, I’m not a man. I’m just a woman who happens to be attracted to other women. Ja, I like the femininity, the softness, the curves, the breasts and all of those things. It’s part of the larger picture of who I am. I don’t feel like I’m a man at all. I don’t understand that, I mean how do you feel like you’re a man if you don’t even know how men feel? That’s weird. That’s a little weird...

Similar to Gemma, Sibongile equates a lesbian identity to a disavowal of femininity. In this view, lesbian women are all assigned as butch and more so, as “denying” their (natural) femininity. They “hate being women” (Gemma) and therefore reject the “softness, the curves, the breasts” (Sibongile) that are regarded as naturally constituting a female identity. Gemma’s reference to the butch dyke as “using this man exterior to hide a deep hurt” indicates an attempt to explain such rejection of femininity as a result of previous traumatic or painful experiences with men. This constructs the butch dyke as psychologically scarred or damaged. Assuming a butch identity is seen as a response to “a deep hurt” (Gemma) and in that way is positioned as abnormal and pathological. Gemma continues this othering strategy when she uses the phrase “those sort of people”, to position the butch dyke as deviant:

There are a few hardcore dykes out there, but I’m not friends with those sort of people. I’d never date one of them, I don’t think I’d want to be seen in public with one of them.

Gemma’s discussion of women who defy traditional notions of female attractiveness is accompanied by a strong emotional response. Similarly, Sibongile’s adamant assertion that while she is attracted

to women, she does not align herself with a lesbian butch identity – “I don’t feel like I’m a man at all” – functions to distance herself from a butch identity. Both Gemma and Sibongile explicitly distance themselves from a construction of lesbian women as butch or masculine and instead align themselves with a femme gender identity. Taub (1999) describes a similar strategy in her research about bisexual women’s engagement with appearance norms, when she notes how some bisexual women resist a traditional butch lesbian look in an attempt to “hold on to some of (their) femininity” (p. 30).

6.6.3 “People will judge you”: Policing the boundaries around butch and femme

This vehement policing of the boundary between butch and femme relates to participants’ desire to protect their own discursive positioning. A butch/femme dichotomy implies that participants are constructed as more easily accepted in heteronormative spaces, as long as they conform to an idealised construction of femininity. Bisexual women are therefore positioned as more “acceptable” than “hard-core lesbians” who dismiss patriarchal beauty ideals. Bisexuality is constructed as not disrupting femininity to the same extent as a lesbian identity does. The butch dyke is constructed in participants’ accounts as troubling the “natural” gender order and participants’ precarious position in discourse, where they themselves are sexual “others” who do not conform to heteronormativity, is threatened by the butch dyke’s disruption of the normalised female script. Participants regulate these troubling moments through denigrating statements of butch dykes as “weird”, “damaged” and “unfeminine”. In this way the gender trouble produced by the butch dyke is managed in participants’ accounts and the primacy of a traditional female gender identity remains intact (Butler, 1993a). Gemma illustrates this when referring to the image of two feminine-looking women as less likely to rouse disgust and more like to rouse curious interest, compared to the image of two “hardcore dykes”:

I think people are very judgemental on people’s exteriors. So if you had to be a hardcore dyke, and your girlfriend was a hardcore dyke, then people would judge you. But if you and I had to walk around together, they wouldn’t really notice unless they looked very closely, and then they’ll be like ‘oh, those two are together, wow’. It would just kind of be a ‘wow’....

In policing this boundary between butch and femme, participants preserve their relative acceptance in dominant discourse. If constructions of femme bisexuality and butch lesbian merge, then bisexuality’s relative protection from social censure, at least as far as gender non-conformity is concerned, will be threatened. Sonia articulates this fear of marginalisation through associations of bisexuality with the butch dyke construction in the following manner:

Like my mom is afraid that I will become this terribly butch dyke who is going to wear Buffalo shoes and shave my hair off and you know... like get hundreds of thousands of piercings and walk like I have testicles and things like that. And that's not what it is, you know, they have this warped idea of 'oh hell I will have to be ashamed of walking with you soon'.

This relates to how sexual difference is “punished” more harshly by society if one strays from what is acceptable regarding one’s gendered identity. More specifically, in many African and South African contexts, deviation from the heterosexual norm, through for example having same-sex relationships, is tolerated as long as one fulfils other aspects of one’s gendered identity, such as bearing children and being in a heterosexual marriage (Epprecht, 2006). Conforming to traditional female beauty ideals in being feminine enough to still be desired by men means that transgressing sexual norms through relationships with women is met with less intolerance. If participants can pass as straight in their gendered presentation they can avoid some of the discrimination that comes along with a non-heterosexual orientation. Pitman (1999) notes that an awareness of the consequences of not conforming to the “correct” gendered and sexualised identity might be particularly salient for women who are stigmatised due to their sexual orientation, in that such women might have more at stake in not conforming to beauty norms. Subsequently, they might also respond with more hostility when other women do not conform to normative gender scripts. Participants’ relative protection is of course compromised when they are in a publicly visible relationship with a woman, but presenting visually in a manner that supports heteronormative notions of female appearance remains a mechanism for participants to preserve their position in dominant discourse.

In this section I focused on how participants treat femininity in relation to constructing their own gendered identity as bisexual women. The discussion of the findings illustrated participants’ attempts to preserve their relative protection in dominant discourse through ascribing to a femme bisexual identity, as opposed to what they construct as a marginalised and othered butch lesbian identity. In the following section I consider participants’ engagement with heteronormative discourses.

6.7 Heteronormativity and bisexuality

Heteronormativity refers to the privileged position associated with heterosexuality, where certain idealised constructions of gender and sexuality are valued and act to inform social life in pervasive ways (Jackson, 2006). Normative notions of heterosexuality function in two ways through not only regulating “those kept within its boundaries” but also through “marginalising and sanctioning those

outside them” (Jackson, 2006, p. 105). Heteronormativity then has implications not only for heterosexually-identified individuals, but also structures subjectivity for individuals positioned as marginal in relation to a heterosexual norm. Gay, lesbian and bisexual individuals construct their identities and their relationships in relation to a heteronormative discursive context, even when resisting such a norm.

A central way in which heteronormativity is constructed and maintained as a powerful societal discourse, is through evoking the institution of heterosexual marriage as normal and socially valued. Intertwined with this is the notion of creating a traditional nuclear family, in the context of a heterosexual union. Heterosexual marriage, in its current cultural form, can be described as heteronormative in that it works to permeate a specific arrangement of sexual and gendered practice with a “tacit sense of rightness and normalcy” (Berlant & Warner, 1998, p. 554). This extends beyond a particular marital configuration to the normalisation of certain types of sexualities, genders and family configurations (Fumia, 1997).

In the following section I consider how heteronormativity functions in the accounts of participants, particularly as it relates to their evocation of a “(heterosexual) marriage and family” discourse. This heteronormative discourse appears to impact on participants’ subjectivity in varied ways and functions as a meta discourse around and through which the lives of the bisexual women in this study are shaped. This influence is exerted despite the fact that none of the participants are married or intending to marry in the immediate future (either in an opposite-sex or same-sex configuration). The prevailing influence of this discourse illustrates its taken-for-granted nature – despite positioning themselves as outside heteronormativity through identifying as bisexual, participants still engage with a marriage and family discourse in shaping their subjectivity, their romantic relationships and their notions of family. The discussion that follows is structured to describe four different ways in which participants, as bisexual women, engage with this discourse.

6.7.1 “You have this image ready-made”: Marriage and family discourse as familiar

The first position that could be identified in the text is one in which participants align themselves with an idealised version of marriage and family discourse. Despite indicating an awareness of how not all traditional heteronormative families fit this idealised description, participants’ talk reflected romanticised notions of marriage and family – what one participant, Taryn, refers to as “that picture idea of what a family is”. This idealised version of marriage and family discourse is described as a normative expectation that cannot easily be questioned or resisted. Jennifer refers to this when she

describes how, when growing up, she was certain that she will “end up” married to a man and will have children in a conventional way: “In my head it was ‘I’m going to get married to a man, and have children, and done’. Cause that’s what your parents say, and that’s what you see around you, that’s what’s expected of you”.

Jennifer’s statement draws on the dominant heterosexist belief and expectation that “everyone is or should be heterosexual” (Yep, 2002, p. 167). Her sexuality is assumed by others and by herself to be heterosexual until “proven” otherwise. Going against this normative expectation requires resisting a powerful societal assumption positing heterosexual marriage as normal, natural and universally desired (Richardson, 1996).

While Jennifer describes this normative expectation as a sense of being pressured to conform to heterosexism (when she states “that’s what’s expected of you”) this construction also allows for a predictable, familiar and clearly outlined life-course. Liné refers to this when she says that “getting married with kids is kind of where you are supposed to go. It’s the easiest way for everyone”. Taryn refers to the familiarity of this discourse by stating “if you think about marriage with a man it’s a straightforward notion... You have this image ready-made that you can just slot in there”. In this construction, heteronormative marriage and family discourse acts as a widely familiar blueprint with clearly outlined life stages through which compliant subjects can proceed. It depicts heterosexual marriage as uncomplicated, comforting and socially valued. Part of the appeal of this idealised marriage and family discourse is then the sense of safety and acceptance it affords subjects who can conform to its requirements.

While this position generally reflects an idealised version of heteronormative discourse, participants at times assumed resistant positions where they commented on the coercive nature of such a discourse, hinted at in Jennifer’s framing of this discourse as an expectation held by others. The familiar “ready-made” nature of this discourse is seen as constraining individual choices that might differ from dominant discourse. Liné describes this in the following way: “I think in that mind-set [of getting married to a man and having children] you don’t have to think for yourself, so then you just go down that route along with all the other sheep”. The hegemonic nature of this discourse functions to limit participants’ agency and their ability to choose the type of life they would like to have. While a marriage and family discourse might provide a romanticised and “uncomplicated” subject position, participants also position themselves as critical of the lack of autonomy implied in this discourse.

6.7.2 “You’re always up against a husband and children”: Bisexuality as competing with marriage and family discourse

Identifying as bisexual has implications for how participants position themselves in relation to a heteronormative marriage and family discourse. Participants drew on a construction of bisexuality as competing with an idealised marriage and family discourse. Several participants spoke about how marriage and family discourse is seen as a threat to their same-sex relationships, particularly so if their partner also identifies as bisexual. Astrid describes how, in her relationship with her bi-partner, she has a sense of always being in competition with the romanticised construction of marriage and family that is dominant in society. She goes on to talk about her sense of helplessness in not being able to provide her partner with the normalcy and social acceptance that the marriage and family discourse provides heterosexual subjects:

Astrid: It doesn’t matter how much I love my girlfriend, I can’t give her a child, that is our child. So it’s a big issue. And I have to understand that if she wants that child, biologically, and she had to leave me because she wanted that ideal family, I could never resent her... You can make your own family and obviously there’s lots of ways to do it, but there’s a romantic idea about family.

Ingrid: Ja, that you compete with in a sense.

Astrid: You do, of course you do. I would say that’s the toughest thing about bisexuality.

Identifying as bisexual and being in a same-sex relationship means that participants cannot conform to the idealised image of marriage and family depicted in a heterosexual relationship. Heterosexual marriage is constructed as resulting in “that ideal family”, which Astrid describes as a “romantic idea about family”. Contrasted to this, a family resulting from a same-sex union is (by implication) constructed as not having the same value as a heterosexual family union, which can provide for a biological child that is “their child”. As long as they are in a relationship with a woman, participants do not have access to the normalised subject position offered by marriage and family discourse. This echoes lesbian women’s experiences of a heteronormative rendering of same-sex families as “artificial”, “wrong” or less “real” than heterosexual families (Clarke, 2001; Saffron, 1994). Astrid however adds that this is “the toughest thing about bisexuality”, implying that the notion of choice differentiates bisexuality from lesbian experience in her account. She draws on the perception that bisexual partners are considered as having the option of having a “normal” heterosexual relationship that is accepted and rewarded in heteronormative contexts – an option which lesbian women do not have:

Astrid: And I think with bisexuality for me and with being with women, there's always that, you're always up against the life picture. You're always up against a husband and children. It's a big fucking picture, even for myself. It's the way we all, or 90% of people want to end up, you know, in a family.

In this construction, if a bisexual partner highly values and desires the normalised subject position provided by marriage and family discourse, she could choose to be in a relationship with a man instead of a woman. Liné speaks about this in the context of dating a lesbian woman, and the fear her partner had that she will leave the same-sex relationship to “get married and have babies”, something that is not easily provided for in the same-sex relationship:

And the lesbian [that I dated] also thought, you know, that I will cheat. Or the fear was that I will meet the man of my dreams and get married and have babies. Because getting married and having babies is, for example, something that she cannot give me.

It is interesting to note that while participants resist the notion that bisexual women cannot be monogamous or commit to a long-term relationship, their reflections on their own relationships indicate a sense of being co-opted by dominant discourse where they doubt their partner's commitment in the relationship. Their constructions of being in a same-sex relationship, as bisexual women, reflect a continued presence of uncertainty in that their partner might leave the relationship for a socially valued heterosexual relationship with a man. In this sense they draw on the terms provided by dominant discourse in constructing meaning in their relationships. Bisexuality is constructed here as a threat to the permanence and value of the same-sex relationship. Further to this, Astrid's comment that she “could never resent” her partner if she chose a normalised heterosexual relationship points to a resigned acceptance of this risk as part of identifying as bisexual.

6.7.3 “It isn't any kind of option for having a good life”: Bisexuality as incompatible with marriage and family discourse

A third position assumed by participants, in engaging with heteronormative marriage and family discourse, is one in which bisexuality is not considered as competing with such a discourse but is instead regarded as *incompatible* with its normalised developmental narrative. This occurs mainly through evoking a widely circulating construction of bisexuality as customarily equated with promiscuity, briefly referred to above. In such a construction bisexuality is equated with non-monogamy and loyalty to one partner is considered unlikely or impossible (Eadie, 1996; Klesse,

2005). Participants referred to how they often encounter responses to their sexual identification that position them as hypersexual and promiscuous. Sonia describes this when she states “that’s how bisexuality often gets portrayed, [that] these girls can’t get enough sex from guys so they get it from girls too... That is the common conception of what it is... [People are] just like, okay, so you sleep around a lot”.

In such a construction, where bisexuality is equated with promiscuity, identifying as bisexual does not allow for a committed monogamous relationship and therefore cannot provide the “ideal” outcome of the marriage and family discourse. Through evoking such a construction, bisexuality is positioned as inconsistent with the kind of stable and fulfilled life that is depicted in the marriage and family discourse. Jennifer speaks about her parents drawing on a construction of bisexuality as incompatible with a marriage and family discourse: “My dad just wants the best for me, and he doesn’t think that [lifestyle] is the best. He doesn’t see it as being any kind of option for having a good life, with children, a stable family, kids...”

This construction of bisexuality as incompatible with a monogamous relationship also serves to destabilise the normalised life-course depicted in a marriage and family discourse. In identifying as bisexual, participants sacrifice the familiarity and predictability of the marriage and family discourse, since bisexuality is constructed as incompatible with a stable, long-term relationship. This has the implication that bisexual women do not have access to the clearly defined developmental narrative depicted in the marriage and family discourse. The marriage and family discourse is constructed as a linear developmental process where one proceeds through various pre-determined and socially prescribed stages, part of which includes getting married (to a man) and creating one’s own family. Gemma refers to this when describing her “straight friends” as being “on that path - they’ve all been dating their boyfriends for the past two or three years, they’re going to have a ring on their finger, or they’re married or they’re gonna be pregnant soon, that kind of thing”. As bisexual women, participants do not share in the normalised developmental narrative of a long-term relationship, implied by heteronormative marriage and family discourse.

In addition to defining heterosexual marriage and the subsequent creation of a family as part of a “natural” and normative developmental course, heteronormative marriage and family discourse also provides a well-developed structure for what is considered a successful heterosexual relationship. Acts like cohabiting, getting married and ultimately having children not only signify a socially sanctioned developmental path, their achievement also constructs relationships as requiring a

progression through these stages. It is not considered adequate to settle at an earlier stage in this developmental sequence – a successful relationship should be “moving forward” or progressing towards certain points (which participants mainly described as getting married and having children). In identifying as bisexual, this normative expectation of their life course (settling down and having children) as well as the construction of their relationships as progressing towards something (where a successful relationship entails reaching certain milestones such as getting married) are disrupted. As Astrid notes: “You don’t feel like there’s this natural progression to things. You know, straight people just have a child and naturally progress”.

Participants’ accounts indicate that they do not share in the mapped out narrative widely available in dominant discourse. They sacrifice the certainty that a heterosexual subject position affords where, as Astrid describes it, “you still take it relationship by relationship”. Such a description posits bisexuality as inconsistent with a stable, long-term relationship with the “ideal” outcome of marriage. This stands in contrast to a normalised heterosexual relationship, which is assumed to progress through a process of serial monogamy culminating in marriage. It also stands in contrast to a normalised lesbian relationship model that prescribes a long-term, monogamous union. Social science accounts often describe a hierarchy of monogamy starting with lesbian couples at the top, followed by heterosexual couples and lastly by gay men (e.g., Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983) with Bebkco and Johnson (2000, p. 414) referring to the commonly held stereotype of lesbian couples as “psychologically fused” or as “enjoying a greater capacity for closeness” than either heterosexual couples or gay men. Constructions of bisexuality as equated with non-monogamy serve to exclude bisexuality from a narrative that depicts a committed long-term relationship and render it as incompatible with marriage and family discourse, either in a same-sex or an opposite sex union.

6.7.4 “Family is important to me”: Rearticulating marriage and family discourse

A heteronormative construction of marriage and family excludes same-sex relationships, yet many of the participants in the study positioned themselves as resisting such exclusion. They drew on a transformed notion of family where it can be achieved in a same-sex relationship as well. Taryn describes this as follows:

Family is important to me. But I guess I’ve realised that if you’re with a woman it doesn’t mean that you have to let go of the notion of family, and you don’t need a husband to achieve that... I’ve kind of let go of that picture idea of what a family is, you know. Cause it’s not always that way... Who is to say two women won’t do the same if not a better job?

Sibongile, in expressing her desire to have children, describes her preference for this to happen in a same-sex relationship:

I just know it (having children) won't be in the conventional way, you know. Like I was saying earlier - as much as I'm attracted to both males and females, I see myself settling down with a female rather than a male....

However, even in rearticulating the marriage and family discourse to accommodate same-sex family configurations, participants emphasised a sense of loss that they associate with achieving a family in a non-traditional way. As Taryn noted, she had to “let go of that picture idea” of a romanticised notion of family. In rearticulating her position in marriage and family discourse, she had to give up a narrative of herself having a family in a socially valued way and “accept” that she will do it in a non-traditional way. Similarly, Sibongile differentiates a same-sex family from what is regarded as “normal” when she says, “I do want children, they just won't grow up in the normal - what is considered normal – sense”.

Along with this sense of loss, participants also constructed achieving a family in a same-sex union as requiring work. They spoke about particular challenges in achieving a non-traditional family, such as it being costly and for many participants, out of their financial reach. Astrid, speaking about having children in a same-sex relationship, states: “People are always like, “there are ways”, like yeah, if you're a fucking millionaire (laughs wryly)”. She goes on to say:

It's heart breaking not being able to say that because we love each other we can make a baby... [When in a relationship with a woman] you feel like you really have to work hard to build that family. You have to be financially extremely well off, for in vitro or adoption.

It can be highlighted that participants' rearticulation of heteronormative marriage and family discourse is in relation to being in a relationship with a woman. Participants rarely commented on how they would negotiate having children with a man, as bisexually identified women, and also did not speak about how this discourse can be rearticulated to accommodate bisexuality more generally. Instead they focused their discussions on how same-sex relationships can be accommodated. When participants did speak about the marriage and family discourse as it related to marrying and having children with a man, they referred to it as if they are then reverting to heterosexuality. In these instances they spoke about this traditional configuration as “straightforward” (Taryn), “uncomplicated” and “life made easy” (Nasiphi). In a sense,

heterosexuality is regarded here as having a persuasive pull against which one actively struggles when in a same-sex relationship (where Astrid states that you “have to work hard”). It functions as the “normal” position from which participants have to actively dissociate through the continuous assertion of their sexual identification when in a same-sex relationship, but to which they are easily returned when not.

Such self-positioning as either lesbian or heterosexual seems to erase the possibility of a more enduring bisexual identity, as it relates to marriage and family discourse. This inability to adapt marriage and family discourse to accommodate bisexuality might be due to a more general lack of discussion of bisexuality as it relates to long-term relationships and notions of family. As discussed in the literature review, debates that challenge heteronormative constructions of marriage and the family have been predominantly framed in relation to gay and lesbian identities. Bisexuality has typically not been drawn into these debates, possibly due to its general marginalisation in LGBTI issues (Namaste, 1994; Stein, 1992), and participants therefore only have recourse to a same-sex model for challenging heteronormative notions of marriage and family.

In this section I identified four different positions assumed by participants, in engaging with heteronormative marriage and family discourse. From their accounts it appears that participants take up different and shifting positions in relation to such a discourse - at times supporting this discourse, at other times enveloped and restricted by it, and also in certain instances resisting this discourse. Significantly, despite claiming self-aware bisexual identities, the influence of heteronormative discourse in structuring sexuality along a heterosexual/homosexual binary remains influential and participants’ own accounts in many instances reflect this binary. This was evident in how they constructed two main options in engaging with marriage discourse - in order to gain access to marriage and family discourse, participants are either positioned as being in a same-sex relationship (conforming to a lesbian relationship model) or a heterosexual relationship (conforming to an “uncomplicated” heteronormative relationship model). An integration of their identity as bisexual is not articulated as a valid option in securing access to a marriage and family discourse. This points to the continued erasure of bisexuality from the terms used in dominant discourse to construct individual subjectivity, notions of relationships, and notions of family. Participants’ accounts convey a lack of a language to articulate bisexuality as an identity that remains relevant regardless of the gender of the person they are in a relationship with, when engaging with marriage discourse. In this manner, their accounts indicate a sense of being invisible, as bisexual women, in

marriage and family discourse. I take up the notion of bisexual erasure, as enacted through heteronormative marriage and family discourse, more fully in the final chapter.

6.8 Summary

In this chapter I focused on the findings from the discourse analysis that relate to participants' engagement with discourses of gendered difference and (hetero)sexualised subjectivity. I discussed a discourse of sexuality as identity, which was described as reducing participants' identity to their identification as bisexual. I also discussed participants' resistance to such discursive fixing of their identity, where they drew on a counter-discourse of intersectionality of identity. In presenting the findings related to discourses of gendered difference it was apparent that participants' assume varied and contradicting positions in relation to the dominant male/female binary. This ranged from positions that are critical of the gender binary to those that reinforce it. I concluded the chapter with a discussion of participants' engagement with discourses related to heteronormative marriage and family discourse. I now turn to second and final section of the analysis.

CHAPTER 7

DISMISSAL, DELEGITIMATION AND RE-APPROPRIATION OF BISEXUALITY

7.1 Introduction

In this chapter I present findings related to how bisexuality is delegitimised as a category of sexual identification as well as how same-sex sexuality is silenced in participants' accounts. I conclude with a discussion of the ways in which participants assert bisexuality as a viable identity, in a discursive context in which bisexuality is rendered illegitimate.

7.2 The unintelligibility of bisexuality

In this section I discuss a number of discourses identified in the text that render bisexuality as unintelligible. Bower et al. (2002) describe the unintelligibility of bisexuality as the inability to comprehend bisexuality as a category of sexual identification. This is due to the dominance of a monosexual binary where heterosexuality and homosexuality are constructed as the only valid categories of sexual identification. In such a discursive structure bisexuality is not considered a valid form of sexual desire – it is not understood or made intelligible in popular discourses because of the dominance of the heterosexual/homosexual binary. In the analysis for this section I was interested in how participants negotiate bisexual identities in such a discursive context.

Participants often referred to the unintelligibility of bisexuality and the dominance of heterosexuality and homosexuality as the only categories of sexual identification. They described how, despite claiming a bisexual identity, they are often still considered by others as either lesbian or straight. In their experience the category bisexual, although increasingly available in popular discourse, is not one into which they are easily or comfortably placed. During the interviews this was often described as it occurs in relation to other people's perceptions of participants' sexual orientation in relation to the gender of the person with whom they are currently involved - if involved with a man it is assumed that they are straight, if involved with a woman it is assumed that they are lesbian. In that way their sexual identities are discursively "forced" to fit into the dominant hetero-homo binary:

Liné: It is amazing to me how so many people are under the impression that you are only a lesbian or you are only straight.... If I'm in a lesbian relationship I am defined as a lesbian. If I'm in a straight relationship I am defined as straight. So at the end of the day only I really know who I am.

Taryn: If I was with a man, no one would question whether I was bisexual or heterosexual, and when I'm with a woman, no one questions the bisexual aspect either. It's either lesbian or straight.

Sonia: I had a boyfriend recently and my friends would phone me and be like 'oh so are you still straight?' They kind of don't accept that you're bisexual, they see it as if you're dating a guy then you're straight and if you're dating a girl then you're gay, that kind of thing.

Participants also described how it is generally more easily assumed by others that they are homosexual, instead of heterosexual. Despite having had publicly visible relationships with both men and women, many of the participants described how most people would assign them a lesbian identity instead of a straight or bisexual identity. Astrid refers to this when she says "if you've been with a woman once you're pretty much a lesbian according to most people". Taryn goes on to describe this in the following way:

I mean it's weird, everyone I tell that I'm bisexual, after my girlfriend and I have been together for three years now, they go 'okay, but you're with a woman'? And I'm like ja, but I could be with a man, if I wanted to. I'm still attracted to men. But it's like because they see you with a woman, that they think you're gay.

In the section that follows I elaborate on this insistence on positioning participants along a hetero-homo binary, and discuss how three discourses in particular function to position bisexuality as unintelligible within dominant discourse. I first discuss a discourse of an inability to construe sexual desire as "going both ways". This is followed by a discourse of bisexuality as indecision. I conclude this section with a discourse that incites participants to choose between a homosexual or heterosexual orientation.

7.2.1 An inability to construe sexual desire as "going both ways"

The unintelligibility of bisexuality relates to an inability to comprehend sexual desire that could be directed towards both men and women. Sonia describes it as an inability for others to understand that your attraction "can go to both sides". While I indicated in the literature review that sexuality has been increasingly described as fluid (for example by Diamond, 2008), dominant discourse generally still constructs homosexuality and heterosexuality as mutually exclusive categories. Participants spoke about such an inability to construe sexual desire as fluid as rendering bisexuality incomprehensible to others. In such a construction, participants are expected to strongly identify as

either heterosexual or homosexual. Directing their sexual desire to a gender other than what “fits” with the relevant category is construed as incomprehensible:

Taryn: I don’t think a lot of people believe in bisexuality and that it exists. I think people see it as an excuse, kind of. I don’t know, I’ve gotten that feeling a lot, like ‘come on, you obviously prefer one or the other’, and you’re just fucking around if you go the other way or whatever. I think that’s a preconception that people have, that bisexuality doesn’t really exist.

Nasiphi: I think most people think bisexuality is not real. They’re like ‘how could you be bisexual?’

Jennifer: People don’t, they don’t understand the bi thing.

Cara: (Interjects) People don’t want to accept that, really like honestly in South Africa, not even just in South Africa, people do not want to accept that someone could be so flexible that they could be with both genders.

Belinda describes how bisexuality is seen by others as a mysterious middle ground of sexuality, one with which they cannot personally identify and therefore cannot understand: “Most people can’t really go in this middle ground area, this smoky, hazy area that you don’t know which side you’re on”. Belinda goes on to describe this middle ground as “unsettling for people”, as it removes the certainty they attach to the dominant monosexuality binary, where individuals fit neatly into either a heterosexual or homosexual category.

In describing bisexuality as a “flexible” sexuality (Cara), and themselves as able to inhabit this uncertain “middle ground area” of sexuality (Belinda), participants’ accounts position them as potentially “more fluid and visionary than other sexual subjects” in that they are transcending the limits of the heterosexual/homosexual binary (Hemmings, 2002, p. 33). However, the middle ground is not properly constructed as a third category located in between heterosexuality and homosexuality, which can be inhabited by participants. Instead it is described as an ambiguous and indistinct borderland - “this smoky, hazy area” (Belinda). When drawn on in this manner, bisexuality seemingly exists as a discrete epistemological and ontological category that is available to subjects, but is in fact construed as a potential for *either* heterosexual *or* homosexual desire to emerge in an individual, not *both* (Hemmings, 2002; James, 1996). Bisexuality as middle ground “explains” why an individual can be attracted to either women or men, but does not support the viability of attraction to both men and women. In this way, bisexuality as middle ground enables and consolidates heterosexuality and homosexuality, while denying the feasibility of an adult bisexual identity

(Hemmings, 2002). It functions as “the potential that structures both object choice and incorporation of the lost and unmournable object” (Hemmings, 2002, p. 115) but not as attraction that “can go to both sides” (Sonia). In being drawn on as an ambiguous “neutral” category of sexual identity, bisexuality “ultimately disappear[s] in order to prop up theories of hetero/homosexual difference” (James, 1996, p. 218).

7.2.2 “Was that a phase?” Bisexuality as indecision

The unintelligibility of bisexuality is also supported by a discourse of bisexuality as indecision or as confusion about one’s sexual identity. Participants spoke about this discourse as positioning them in negative and marginalising ways: “People think you can’t make up your mind, you’re lukewarm, you’re two-faced” (Sonia). Laetitia described it in a similar way, stating “a lot of people think if you say you’re bisexual then you are two-faced, you can’t make a decision”. A discourse of bisexuality as indecision reinforces essentialist views of sexual orientation as an inherent and stable characteristic of persons; in such a view variations from a “true” homosexual or heterosexual orientation are dismissed as temporary confusion or curiosity (Diamond, 2003).

This discourse of bisexuality as indecision functions in two different ways in participants’ accounts. Firstly, bisexuality is constructed in heteronormative terms as a period of experimentation where the person is “trying out” same-sex sexuality but will eventually return to a heterosexual subject position (similar to the findings described by Bower et al., 2002). Nadia describes how her mother responded to her same-sex relationships saying “child, you’re just going through a phase”. Bisexuality is positioned as an immature sexual identity, and once the phase of sexual experimentation has passed one is expected to return to being heterosexual. Such a heteronormative construction considers one to eventually mature and want to be in a heterosexual relationship with the privileges that go along with it. Laetitia refers to this when she describes how others respond to her same-sex relationships stating “it’ll probably only be a few years until she will want to grow up or have children”. Phindile also describes how others would dismiss her bisexuality stating that she “just needs to find the right guy”. Participants describe how a construction of having resolved their phase of sexual experimentation is reinforced when others such as their parents see them in a relationship with a man. Gemma describes this when she says the following:

I have actually discussed (my sexuality) with my parents. It was five years ago when I had my first girlfriend. And it didn’t really turn out well, so I never really mentioned it again, and I ended up having a boyfriend afterwards. So they were kind of like ‘mmm, was that a phase?’.

Such a heteronormative view of bisexuality as a phase can, in a sense, imply that bisexuality functions as a lighter blow compared to coming out as gay, because the person is perceived as still being at a point where they can return to a heterosexual subject position. It can be more easily construed as a phase that will pass, and when dating men again this is strengthened even more. Sonia refers to this when she says “it’s easier for my parents to accept (that I am) bi than to accept that I’m gay, because bi leaves open that idea of you still turning out straight”. In this manner, drawing on a discourse of bisexuality as indecision might afford participants some sense of protection from social rejection and censure. Nadia’s statement (when she describes her mother as saying “child, you’re just going through a phase”) indicates a dismissal of her same-sex relationships as authentic, or as deserving of the presumably more punitive response a “true” lesbian identification might evoke. A discourse of bisexuality as indecision, as drawn on in this context, potentially minimises the transgressive nature of same-sex sexuality. The dismissal of participants’ sexual identification as a period of experimentation might then in fact allow them more space within which to enact their sexuality, precisely because their identification as bisexual is not considered “real”.

A second way in which a discourse of bisexuality as indecision functions is through constructing bisexuality as a transitional stage to achieving a more enduring gay identity. Here bisexuality is also regarded as a phase, but in this case as part of a process of coming to terms with being gay - again similar to what Bower et al. (2002) suggest in their findings. As discussed in the literature review, theories of sexual identity formation often regard bisexuality as a stage in the development of a gay identity. While this is often the case for lesbian women, in the interviews it was apparent that this construction functions for participants as a dismissal of bisexuality as a more enduring identity. This was particularly the case when lesbian partners and friends viewed participants’ bisexuality through their own experience of achieving a lesbian identity, where bisexuality was only a stage they went through in coming to terms with their homosexuality. Jennifer refers to this when she mentions how a lesbian friend dismissed her bisexuality and described her as lesbian instead: “She said to me ‘just get over yourself Jennifer, the way you think you’re not straight, you’re gay’”. Liné also describes how, when she was in a relationship with a lesbian woman, her partner did not acknowledge her bisexuality: “she wanted to think that I am actually a lesbian”.

It can be seen that in both instances bisexuality is dismissed as a transient identity – where the person is either going through a phase of sexual experimentation but will eventually return to an enduring heterosexual identity, or where the person is seen as going through a transitional stage of

moving towards an enduring homosexual identity. As Sonia describes it, “it’s that idea of bisexuality being a screen or shield - so you’re going to turn out gay or you’re going to turn out straight, you’re not going to be bi forever”. A construction of bisexuality as indecision implies that it is not an enduring sexual identity and it is not considered as having the same sense of permanence that a heterosexual or homosexual identity has. Participants are expected to eventually settle into their “real” sexual identity, which is either gay or straight.

7.2.3 The incitement to choose

A consequence of the discourse of bisexuality as indecision is that bisexually-identified individuals are, within such a discourse, incited to “choose a side”. Since this discourse does not construct bisexuality as a valid category of sexual identification, participants are positioned as needing to choose between a heterosexual or homosexual identity. Owen (2003) notes:

[The] heterosexual economy depends upon the orderly progression from ‘male or female’ to ‘boy or girl’ to ‘man or woman’ to ‘husband and wife’. Bisexuality, with its refusal to choose, thus poses a challenge to the sex-gender binarism in particular, and monosexuality in general. (p. 34)

Participants spoke about such an incitement to choose in two different ways. Firstly, they described an internalised construction of needing to identify as either gay or straight, with bisexuality not being available as a category of identification. This was discussed in relation to participants’ experiences when they were younger where participants indicated that the lack of validation of bisexuality as a category of sexual identification left them feeling as if they had to make a choice between being gay or straight. Since the category bisexuality is not widely acknowledged, they did not feel that they had any reference points for identifying as bisexual at that point in their lives. Participants described how this left them feeling that their same-sex feelings necessarily positioned them as lesbian, despite still being attracted to the opposite sex. Liné spoke about the conflict this created for her when she had her first relationship with a woman:

Obviously at the beginning you think, ‘oh my God, maybe I then am a lesbian, I’ve been fooling myself’. It’s very confusing, at the beginning, to figure out what you are.... Suddenly you’re like ‘but fuck, now I’m a lesbian’. And then you go through that struggle of ‘but can I now never have a man again?’ ‘Am I never allowed to actually be with a man because I’m a lesbian now?’, and then it’s even more confusing. And then you go ‘but I like men and I like women, am I wrong for doing that?’ What’s going on in my head? Am I fucked up?

Belinda describes going through a similar process when she was in high school and attempting to make sense of her attraction to both men and women, when she states: “I did wonder, does this mean I’m a lesbian? Does this mean I don’t like men?” The dominance of the heterosexual/homosexual binary, at the expense of bisexuality being a valid category of sexual identification, means that participants have no reference point for constructing a bisexual identity. Sonia describes this in the following way:

You just have no reference for it. If you're straight then your parents tell you okay this is what you do, this is how your life is going to go, and this is how your role is going to be in your relationship one day.... (If you're bi) you have to create your own identity because you don't have any reference for it.

Secondly, participants referred to how such an incitement to choose played out in their lives at the point where they now identify as bisexual. They discussed how others had an expectation that they should choose between heterosexuality and homosexuality, despite their own view of having reached a point where they are comfortable with their sexual identity as bisexual:

Gemma: So my friends would say to me ‘Gemma, when are you going to decide, you should start deciding’. And I just think ‘why, why must I decide? Why must I decide for you?’ So ja, I never really decided.... I’m not going to be closed off to any possibility.

Jennifer: I told someone in my family ‘no, I’m not gay I’m bisexual’. And she said ‘have you slept with a man?’ And I said ‘no’, and she said ‘have you slept with a woman?’ And I said ‘no, I’ve never had sex with a man, or sex technically with a woman, you know that had gone that far with either’. And she said ‘well, then you don’t know’. She said you can’t live on the fence; you have to choose a side.... so she doesn’t believe that you can be bisexual.

In this section I focused on discourses that render bisexuality as unintelligible. I presented a discourse of an inability to construe sexual desire as “going both ways”, where participants’ flexibility in their attraction to both men and women is positioned as incomprehensible. I also discussed a discourse of bisexuality as indecision where participants were positioned as either experimenting with same-sex sexuality but “essentially” being straight, or as being in a process of achieving a more enduring gay identity. Both constructions dismiss bisexuality as an enduring category of sexual identification. I concluded with a discussion of the discursive incitement for participants to choose between either a heterosexual or homosexual category of identification.

These discourses function to render bisexuality as unintelligible as it is dismissed as a viable category of sexual identification. They also reinforce the dominance of the heterosexual/homosexual binary, where identifying as gay or straight remain the only options. The heterosexual/homosexual binary functions here to displace bisexual self-identification from the present moment and positions it as an identity that can only be achieved through participants' reflections on past relationships. This last aspect relates to how a bisexual identity, in other's reading of one's sexuality, needs to be continuously asserted and reasserted over time (which, unless participants are in polyamorous relationships with both men and women, is not easily achieved). These discourses, in rendering bisexuality unintelligible, construct it as an identity that is not viable in the current moment.

7.3 Delegitimising discourses

In this section I discuss discourses identified in the text that act to delegitimise bisexuality as a valid option for participants' sexual identification. Several aspects of the discourses I discuss here relate to how bisexuality is constructed in media discourses, referred to by participants during the interviews. In these constructions bisexuality is, in contrast to the previous section of discourses, highly visible. Bisexuality is not unacknowledged or rendered unintelligible, instead it is explicitly named and constructed in highly sexualised ways - often in support of a male heterosexual fantasy. While bisexuality is considered incomprehensible in the previous grouping of discourses, in this section it is acknowledged and popularised, however in mostly negative or marginalising terms. In these discourses, bisexuality is discredited as a valued sexual identity as it is predominantly positioned in relation to its appeal as part of an erotic fantasy or as associated with promiscuity. These constructions of bisexuality in media depictions are also mirrored in participants' interactions on a more personal level, and to this end I discuss how bisexuality is constructed in participants' discussions of how others respond when they disclose their sexual orientation.

The guiding question in the analysis for this section was, similar to the previous section, to explore how bisexuality is constructed as an object in the text. I was also interested in how broader public discourses, such as media depictions of bisexuality, function in participants' constructions of bisexuality. The first discourse that I discuss here is that of bisexuality as an eroticised heterosexual male fantasy. This is followed by a discussion of a discourse of bisexuality as necessarily being equated with promiscuity.

7.3.1 The hot-bi-babe: Bisexuality as an eroticised heterosexual male fantasy

I start the discussion here by first considering how this discourse is drawn on by participants when reflecting on male responses when disclosing their sexual identification as bisexual, followed by a discussion of participants' references to the eroticised depiction of female bisexuality in popular media.

Participants referred to the widely circulating construction of female same-sex sexuality as sensual or erotic, and related this to men's responses to their own bisexuality. As discussed in the literature review, while male same-sex encounters are not typically regarded as erotic, the idea of two women having sex is generally seen as sexually appealing to heterosexual men. Such a male fantasy of female bisexuality consists of men being either observers of intimate acts between female lovers, or being participants in a *ménage à trios* with two women. In this construction of bisexuality as a heterosexual male fantasy, bisexual women are visible only in relation to male sexual pleasure. Belinda refers to this construction in the following manner:

Guys actually don't mind [when I tell them I've been with women]. I don't know what that is but there's something weird about guys and lesbians, I don't know why but they seem to like that, the idea of two women together. It turns them on for whatever reason.

While Belinda makes specific reference to the widely circulating construction of lesbian women as erotic, female bisexuality lends itself even more readily to a positioning as a heterosexual male fantasy; bisexual women are attracted to men as well as women and men can therefore more realistically be included in such a fantasy. Laetitia talks about how male partners, knowing that she identifies as bisexual, would anticipate the involvement of another woman in their relationship:

With guys.... they usually know beforehand that I was gay or have been with girls and that actually intrigues them more. In most cases I think that it's kind of the incentive for them to do anything... (Ingrid: Why do you think that is?) I don't know, I think it's more their idea of 'you were with a girl', they like the whole concept. And the few guys I have been with always played around with the idea of a threesome because they want to use two girls. So it's a very sexual thing for them.

A discourse of bisexuality as a heterosexual male fantasy constructs bisexual women as erotic and sexually adventurous, but also renders women as sexual objects. This is apparent in Laetitia's earlier reference to men wanting to "use two girls". Jennifer, talking about men making sexual advances

towards her and her girlfriend, articulates this objectification succinctly: “It’s disgusting because as soon as you say you’re bisexual you are more of an object than a woman, and a woman is an object already”. In fact, one could argue that a heterosexual fantasy of bisexual women is only erotic if the women in it are objectified. This discourse does not advance a subject position of bisexual women as active sexual agents where women have sexual autonomy. Instead, in this discourse what is considered erotic is bisexual women as their sexuality relates to men. It is a construction of bisexual women’s sexuality as being in the service of men, directed towards male pleasure or as props in a male fantasy. Laetitia describes how, despite the eroticisation of bisexuality, women’s accepted role is not one that entails active sexual exploration:

People look like they are much more open to the idea of two girls than they are to two men, like less people are offended by the idea of two girls together than they are by two men. But I think that in general.... a woman has like this role she has to fulfil and it isn't a role of sexual exploration.... I don't feel like we can say 'hey, I like to watch porn' or something like that. It is something that is more male dominant. We are not allowed to explore such things sexually...

Laetitia goes on to say that a woman who does explore her sexuality and exhibit sexual agency is “easily stereotyped as a slut, you know, like a hooker”. Women are then not granted the freedom to explore their sexuality lest they be labelled promiscuous. Laetitia’s statements emphasise that the apparent acceptance of bisexuality, implied by its eroticisation, is conditional in that it is premised on women being cast as sexual objects in the service of male pleasure.

In positioning bisexual women as sexual objects, this discourse comments on what is considered appropriate and inappropriate sexualities for “proper” or marriageable women. In this discourse bisexual women are not seen as existing inside what she terms the charmed circle of sexuality. Rubin (1984) refers to certain sexualities, such as heterosexual, marital and monogamous, as forming the charmed circle of what is considered socially valued sexuality. “Deviant” sexualities are positioned outside this sexual value system. Within such a view, bisexual women might be eroticised in this discourse, but they are not construed as the “type” of woman that men, existing in a context of normative heterosexuality, would want to be in a long term relationship with or would want to marry. It is in this manner that the eroticisation of female bisexuality does not necessarily indicate the acceptance of female sexual autonomy or exploration but instead says something about what is considered sexually attractive and interesting to men, and how that differs from the type of women to which men would want to commit romantically. This distinction between deviant and normal

sexuality evokes the widely cited sexual dualism of the madonna-whore complex, where women are regarded as sexually attractive when cast as objects in the service of male pleasure (the whore construction), while women who conform to a feminine ideal of sexual passivity and purity are seen as “relationship material” (the virginal madonna construction) (De Beauvoir, 1949/1988).

Some of the complexity of the objectification of bisexual women in this discourse becomes apparent in what Astrid says when she talks about men being threatened by bisexuality when they are confronted with it being more than just a sexual performance in support of a male fantasy:

It will always be alright for you to make out with a chick in front of a guy, men will always be cool with it. Until they think their girlfriend might be macking¹² you. If it's intellectual or spiritual, they become frightened and threatened and you'll feel it.

What Astrid says here supports what Laetitia refers to earlier – that men are attracted to the sexual aspect of female bisexuality. The notion of women being erotic with each other is accepted within this construction because it is considered sexually appealing to men. However, once it is something that includes a “deeper” connection between women, or something that is “intellectual or spiritual” as described by Astrid, men are no longer the focus of what is occurring between the two women; it is no longer a performance for men's pleasure but is instead seen as a relationship with the full weight of an emotional connection. Men are suddenly positioned as being on the outside and feel threatened by this. Men are accepting of bisexual women when they are cast as sexual objects in an erotic fantasy. However, men become suspicious and antagonistic when bisexual women are regarded as a threat to their heterosexual existence in which they date “normal” heterosexual women.

This discourse of bisexual women as a heterosexual male fantasy of course has implications not only for women's subjectivity, but also for men's. This discourse positions men as overly focused on sex, at the expense of the emotional or intellectual dimensions of a relationship, described by Laetitia in the quote below as “the head stuff”. In this discourse men are viewed almost as sexual predators – they view women as sexual objects to be used for their pleasure and are unconcerned with women's desires or needs. While it appears that men are reducing women to sexual objects in this discourse, one could also argue that men are to a large extent also reduced to their sexuality in that they are

¹² The term macking as it is used here refers to flirting with someone (Urban Dictionary, n.d.).

depicted in a somewhat one-dimensional manner. This was illustrated by Laetitia's earlier comment on men's focus on sexual aspects of female bisexuality:

And the few guys I have been with always played around with the idea of a threesome because they want to use two girls. So it's a very sexual thing for them.

Laetitia goes on to say:

To them it isn't at all about how the relationship works or the head stuff.... I have yet to find a guy where it didn't... the reason why I'm not in a long term relationship with a guy is because I haven't found a guy yet who doesn't talk about bisexuality like that.... I don't know, males are just wired differently from us.

By drawing on a discourse of biological differences when talking about men just being "wired differently" from women, a view of men being driven by sexual desire is given even more weight – it is solidified as a universal and inherent characteristic of men. This resonates with Hollway's (1984) "male sexual drive" discourse, which positions men as more sexually motivated than women. In such a discourse, men are regarded as driven by a biological need to be sexually satisfied – a need which they cannot easily suppress. By drawing on this discourse, Laetitia minimises men's accountability for sexualising bisexual women – if men are "naturally" more sexually motivated than women, then it follows that they will construct female bisexuality as purely a "sexual thing".

My discussion now turns to how female bisexuality is depicted in media accounts. A construction of bisexual women as a heterosexual male fantasy not only plays out in conversations between men and women, but is also increasingly present in media depictions of bisexuality. There is of course an interplay between media discourses and personal discourses – Diamond (2005) notes that "observing sex between otherwise heterosexual women has long been a staple of male fantasy, but only recently has this fantasy graduated from the shelves of pornographic video stores to mainstream movies and television shows" (p. 105). Diamond (2005) employs the term heteroflexibility, borrowed from Essig (2000), to refer to the increasing occurrence of heterosexual women depicted in the media as experimenting with same-sex sexuality. A recent example of pop artists presenting as bisexual include the much publicised kiss shared first between Madonna and Britney Spears, and then between Madonna and Christina Aguilera during an MTV Video Music Award performance (Moss, 2003). In addition to such instances of public heteroflexibility, self-identified bisexual women are also increasingly visible in media discourses and are generally

presented in highly eroticised ways. Examples of celebrities who have publicly claimed a bisexual identity include Lady Gaga, Fergie, Lindsay Lohan, Jessie J and Drew Barrymore (List of bisexual people, n.d.).

During the interviews, participants referred to the increasing prevalence of female bisexuality as a theme in popular culture. Participants described the manner in which these depictions position bisexuality in different ways. Some participants described such depictions as negative in that the media presents bisexual women as hyper-sexed and as “sluts”. Popularising images of female bisexuality are regarded as an extension of the use of sex to sell products or promote artists’ appeal:

Sonia: Like with Lady Gaga and Katy Perry and so on, it’s almost like our society has become so hyper-sexed that it’s not good enough anymore to be a slut, you now also have to be getting it from girls. I think society has become oversexed, because it is that idea of a bi girl being objectified even more than a straight girl, because now it’s two girls, it’s like ‘double whammy, oh my word it’s amazing’.... It’s very sad, because we are so used to sex that we need something new. We need to not only see sluts but we also want to see sluts together.

The subversive potential of media depictions of bisexuality is minimised by attributions of these representations to a media strategy to exploit the attention-capturing value of sexual controversy. Instead of spurring on debates around sexual fluidity or greater acceptance of same-sex sexuality, these media depictions are often regarded as ploys by artists to be seen as controversial (Diamond, 2005). That contributes in the delegitimisation of bisexuality as a valid category of sexual identification.

In addition to what can be considered negative constructions of female bisexuality in the media, such images of female bisexuality were also described by participants in positive terms. Participants described the eroticisation of bisexual women as countering what Diamond (2005) refers to as stereotypes of same-sex attracted women as “unattractive, masculine, and hostile” (p. 105). Sonia refers to this when she discusses how bisexual women are depicted in the media:

I mean there are beautiful, beautiful non-dykes who are together. The idea of lesbians in the past is that of dykes, you know you can’t have two feminine women together, and now it’s more and more that feminine girls love each other.

As Sonia points out in the above quote, media images of female bisexuality are typically restricted to depictions of women who fit a patriarchal beauty ideal. This perhaps highlights a key feature of this discourse – that it is specifically *feminine* looking bisexual women who are eroticised in this discourse. For participants, the benefit of seeing bisexual women in the media is then that it normalises bisexuality by presenting it in a way that is palatable and even attractive to heterosexual audiences.

Participants also referred to how media depictions of female bisexuality are often framed in ways that emphasise bisexual women’s availability to men. Diamond (2005, p. 105), referring to media depictions of female bisexuality, states that these depictions typically “take pains to clarify that the participants are *not*, in fact, lesbians” so as not to disrupt the fantasy of the male viewer as participant. She continues to state that such images:

... implicitly convey that the most desirable and acceptable form of female-female sexuality is that which pleases *and* plays to the heterosexual male gaze, titillating male viewers while reassuring them that the participants remain sexually available in the conventional heterosexual marketplace. (Diamond, 2005, p. 105, emphasis in original)

Cara refers to this when she speaks about how bisexual women are increasingly included in media accounts such as films, but that the characters typically revert back to a heterosexual subjectivity at some point in the narrative, emphasising their availability to male partners:

If you look at media and movies and stuff.... there’s a lot of movies that support women who are lesbian or gay, but the bi movies always end up that the girl is confused so now she’s with a man again. (Ingrid: Like what kind of movies?). I’m thinking of *Kissing Jessica Stein* that she, it started out so interestingly, you have this cliché artistic girl who is kind of sick of men and is now going for women and then you have this confused straight girl who kind of almost stumbles into this relationship with a girl and it’s all confusing and whatever. And then in the end she ends up with a guy again.

Participants at times articulated positions that resist the objectification of bisexual women in media depictions. Participants challenged highly sexualised images in that they describe their relationships and connections with other women as different from how bisexuality is depicted in popular media. They describe their own same-sex experiences as loving and intimate, but not as solely focused on sex. Sonia refers to this when she says “it’s always this very intimate thing, it’s never this sex thing....

I find it portrayed in the media very differently from how I ever experience it". The objectification of bisexual women in the media means that bisexual women in this study are reluctant to identify as bisexual when they feel they are at risk of being positioned in a similar manner as in dominant media discourses – as hyper-sexed and as sexual objects.

7.3.2 "You've gotta have both": Bisexuality as equated with promiscuity

I now turn to the second discourse identified in this section as contributing to the delegitimisation of bisexuality. Participants often referred to a discourse of bisexuality as necessarily being equated with promiscuity, where it is assumed that if you identify as bisexual you are not able to commit to a monogamous relationship, and crave constant sexual gratification. In this discourse bisexual women are positioned as non-monogamous by "default" based on their attraction to both men and women, in that their attraction to both genders is taken to imply a constant desire for concurrent relationships. In this manner, this discourse invites a construction of bisexual women as hyper-sexed where they are positioned as constantly desiring "both worlds", craving men when they are with a woman and craving women when they are with a man. Mclean (2008) describes this as a construction of bisexuality as "kinky, non-monogamous and sexually depraved" (p. 159). Within this discourse, bisexuality is constructed as uncontained sexual desire through positioning bisexual individuals as having an insatiable desire for both men and women. Participants referred to this discourse in statements such as the following:

Sonia: Because that's how bisexuality often gets portrayed, [that] these girls can't get enough sex from guys so they get it from girls too, and it's just dildo's as far as the eye can see.... that is the common conception of what it is.... It's like people are not interested in finding out more about bisexuality, they're not interested in asking how it works or anything like that. They're just like 'okay, so you sleep around a lot'.

Astrid: It's seen as promiscuous, it's like you can't pick a side, you've gotta have both.

Participants' comments indicate that they do not consider this discourse as accurately portraying their realities as bisexual women. A discourse of bisexuality as equated with promiscuity was described by participants as marginalising their sexual identity through fuelling discrimination against bisexual women. Bisexuality, as it is constructed in this discourse, is seen as a particularly deviant form of sexuality through its association with polyamorous sexual decadence. It is almost as if a transgression from the heterosexual ideal in the form of homosexuality can be tolerated, but bisexuality is seen as "taking it too far" with its associations with sexual excess. Liné comments on

this when she describes how people respond to her sexual identification with statements urging her to “make up [her] mind because [she’s] being greedy”. She is “allowed” to identify as straight or gay, but bisexuality is seen as outside the boundaries of acceptable sexualities, emphasised through descriptions of bisexuality as sexual decadence. In this discourse, bisexuality is constructed as an ultimate transgression of the rules of sexuality, where one’s sexual feelings should be contained within either a heterosexual or homosexual category of identification. Flouting these two options is regarded as self-indulgent. Sonia explains this in the following way:

...and that is why the whole bisexuality thing is so weird because people don't know where to put it, because it's actually in a way now more wrong [than being gay] because you can't make up your mind.... You want your bread buttered on both sides.

This construction of bisexual women as overcome with insatiable desire for both men and women was not the only one highlighted by participants as supporting a discourse of bisexuality as equated with promiscuity. Participants also referred to a construction where gender is deemphasised and pursuing sex is given prominence. In this construction, the focus is not on bisexual women being torn between a desire for both male and female lovers. Instead, the object of sexual satisfaction is regarded as irrelevant. Here, bisexual women are considered as being indiscriminate regarding with whom they have sex. Laetitia refers to this construction when she says “a lot of people think you are just super promiscuous because, you know, you don’t really care, it’s just about the sex”. Cara also refers to this construction when she states the following:

Ingrid: And as you said about these ideas that, that are circulating about bisexuality-

Cara: - promiscuous people especially too hey...

Ingrid: Ja...

Cara: It is quite a big thing for me too.... a lot of people think [bisexuality] is the kiddies who basically, at the end of the day just want to sleep around... which is for me a bit of a very terrible preconceived idea.

The above statement evokes the commonly cited construction of bisexuals as “sleeping with anything that moves” (Ault, 1996). Such statements depict bisexuality as a dangerous undefined sexuality where the boundaries of “normal” or “natural” sex are ignored. Such a sexuality can seem particularly threatening in societies where sexuality is strictly regulated and entire social systems depend on heterosexuality and (heterosexual) marriage being the normative ideal. It seems as if this view of bisexuality constructs it as a moral threat, where if bisexuality becomes accepted and

normalised it is feared that it will invite a slippery slope of loosening sexual ethics, with an eventual degeneration into sexual and social anarchy. Furthermore, participants indicated that such a construction of bisexuality as an indiscriminate pursuit of sex again serves to negatively position their identification as bisexual women, and resulted in them being reluctant to identify as bisexual when they felt they would be positioned in relation to such a construction. For participants, this construction minimises the contribution of emotional aspects of their relationships through reducing bisexuality to sexual activity.

An obvious consequence of a discourse of bisexuality being equated with promiscuity is that bisexual women are positioned as incapable of being faithful to one partner. Below, Liné refers to her male heterosexual partner being concerned that she will be unfaithful, based on her identification as bisexual:

Ingrid: And it's a fear people sometimes have [that you will cheat on them]?

Liné: It definitely is, what my boyfriend said, for example, is 'but now I have double the worries. Because you are looking at men and you are looking at women'.

This discourse of bisexuality as being equated with promiscuity, where bisexual partners are positioned as unable to be monogamous, is reinforced not only by heterosexual male partners, but also by lesbian partners who are suspicious of bisexual women and their ability to be faithful in a relationship. Participants referred to responses by lesbian women who consider bisexual women as untrustworthy partners who cannot commit to a monogamous relationship. Astrid refers to this when she states the following:

Like I said, there's a lot of discrimination from lesbian women towards bisexuals cause they just think it's promiscuous and fucked up.

As mentioned before, a positioning of bisexual women as necessarily promiscuous was one from which participants generally distanced themselves. During the interviews, participants frequently countered a construction of bisexual women as promiscuous by describing themselves as committed and monogamous in their relationships:

Liné: But the fact remains, or what most people do not want to accept, is that when you are in a relationship you will be monogamous with that person. If I am with a woman now I won't sleep with men just because I need it.

Ingrid: So is that the idea that people have...

Liné: People's idea of bisexuality is that you are in constant need of both of the worlds. But what it is about, for me, is that if you commit to a person you commit nevertheless.

Nasiphi: For me it's like if I'm with a guy I'm with a guy, and if I'm with a girl I'm with a girl.

It is interesting how Taryn, in the quote below, describes herself as a "faithful bisexual", to emphasise how she distances herself from the widely circulating construction of bisexuality as equated with promiscuity:

I mean it's weird, everyone I tell that I'm bisexual, after my girlfriend and I have been together for three years now, they go 'okay, but you're with a woman'? And I'm like ja, but I could be with a man, if I wanted to. I'm still attracted to men.... I'm just a faithful bisexual, you know.

An implication of this discourse is that it creates a faithful bisexual/promiscuous bisexual dichotomy and in that way marginalises bisexual women who are non-monogamous. Such a dichotomy pressures bisexual women to act in ways that distance them from a construction of the promiscuous bisexual, less they risk being positioned as promiscuous, sexually decadent or hyper-sexed. If bisexuality is equated with promiscuity (in a society that values monogamy, at least as an ideal), identifying as bisexual can compromise participants' subject positions as "normal" or socially valued. It can then be seen that while bisexuality might generally be associated with a more flexible sexual identity, it does not entirely escape the strict regulation of female sexuality in dominant discourse. Within this discourse of bisexuality as promiscuity, bisexual women need to "defend" themselves from being positioned as promiscuous, and need to act in ways that resist such positioning in order to assert bisexuality as a legitimate sexual identity. Despite resisting normative constructions of sexual identification, bisexual women are still not free from the restrictions heteronormativity places on female sexuality since the dichotomy created by this discourse serves to regulate and control female sexuality.

In this section I focused on two discourses that function to delegitimise bisexuality as a valid sexual category. Participants' perceived media discourses of bisexuality, in particular, as not providing accurate depictions of their lived realities and their experiences of their sexuality. There was a sense that media discourses portray a popularised image of what female bisexuality entails, and informs how others respond to participants' sexual orientation. These depictions serve to marginalise

bisexual women in that their sexual identity is reduced to constructions of promiscuity, hypersexuality and sexual decadence. Participants generally felt uncomfortable with these depictions and described how it differed from their own subjective experiences. In the following section I focus on how heteronormativity impacts on participants' identification as bisexual.

In the following section I focus on discourses that act to silence participants' expressions of same-sex sexuality.

7.4 Silencing discourses

In this section I focus on a grouping of discourses that work together to suppress same-sex sexuality. I termed these discourses silencing discourses as they do not allow for acknowledgement of participants' same-sex attraction or relationships. I first discuss a discourse that posits same-sex sexuality as un-African, followed by discussion of a discourse of same-sex sexuality as sin. Drawing on notions of culture and religion are two widely circulating strategies employed in advancing prohibitions against same-sex sexuality. Yip (2005) notes that referring to such authoritative discourses is generally very effective in silencing counter-discourses that attempt to normalise same-sex sexuality. Religious texts such as the Bible are taken for granted as a higher authority than any individual opinion (Yip, 2005). Through appealing to religious and cultural prohibitions against same-sex sexuality, the formulation of more sophisticated positions against same-sex sexuality are discouraged as uncritical statements such as "the Bible says so" or "that is not our culture", are generally effective in dismissing and silencing same-sex sexuality (Adamczyk & Pitt, 2009; Yip, 2005).

The two discourses presented here were prominent in the interviews, yet did not name bisexuality explicitly. Instead, the focus in these discourses was on prohibitions against same-sex sexuality, or homosexuality. Perhaps this points out that while in many respects bisexual and lesbian women face different challenges, they also have some shared concerns. By virtue of their attraction to and relationships with women, bisexual women often face the same discrimination and marginalisation directed at lesbian women. Further to this, it is important to note that in not naming bisexuality, it also points to the absence of bisexuality in two discourses that wield a very powerful influence in shaping notions of what constitutes valued or "natural" sexualities.

7.4.1 Same-sex sexuality as un-African

A discourse identified in the literature review that was also drawn on in the interviews is that of same-sex sexuality being regarded as un-African. This discourse refers to notions of same-sex

sexuality as a Western import that was introduced in Africa during colonial occupation. As I discussed in Chapter 4, the view that same-sex sexuality did not occur in African contexts prior to Western influence is inaccurate. However, many historical accounts of African sexualities insist on a construction of what Epprecht (2006) refers to as a misrepresented “‘pure’ African heterosexual” (p. 188). Contemporary constructions of African sexualities in many instances still uphold this misrepresentation and same-sex sexuality among black South Africans remains commonly regarded as un-African, foreign and unnatural.

Participants referred to this discourse of same-sex sexuality as un-African as a powerful silencing discourse. Phindile equated this discourse with the way in which religious discourses prohibit same-sex sexuality, stating: “It’s the same sort of logic that a lot of Christian people apply, where they say ‘cause God said so’. Who are you to argue with God! And you’re like, okay, then I’ll just shut up”. Having others refer to same-sex sexuality as un-African serves to close off any discussion of participants’ bisexuality. It is such a powerful discourse that it is difficult for participants to challenge it or a find space within it where same-sex sexuality is acknowledged or accepted.

Participants discussed the existence of same-sex practices in Africa prior to colonial occupation, indicating their own disagreement with a view of same-sex sexuality being a Western import. Phindile, for example, referred briefly to research documenting same-sex sexuality in African contexts in pre-colonial periods:

I was reading a book in the library and it was a book on homosexuality in Africa.... This person wrote an article, citing examples of homosexual, accepted homosexual behaviour in Africa. Like in some parts of Africa it’s okay for women to marry women, in other parts of Africa men would marry men.... So, I don’t know if it’s un-African.... I personally don’t think that there’s anything un-African about it, obviously (laughs).

Participants were however not concerned with “defending” same-sex sexuality as in fact being African. “Evidence” of same-sex sexuality in pre-colonial times was not drawn on as a strategy to retrieve same-sex sexuality in Africa from discourses that dismissed or silenced it. Instead, participants’ focus was on the need to create discursive spaces in which different constructions of African identities are possible. To this end they drew on a construction of identity as located in particular historical and cultural contexts. Participants indicated a desire to have contextualised meanings around what being African denotes, where variability of identity is acknowledged and valued. Sibongile and Phindile describe this in the following way:

Sibongile: There cannot be one definition of what is African. I think if you find yourself say in a tribe in Venda or something, then obviously there's a code of conduct there, the rules that people follow and a standard to which you subscribe and live by. Then, within your context, that is what is African. But I think you need to be mindful and respectful of the fact that not everyone lives the way you do, so their definition will be different.

Phindile: My idea of African is, I'm positive, like 100% completely different from a rural boy's perception of what it means to be African.

Participants argued for the recognition of the variable construction of identity across such contexts where same-sex sexuality may or may not be included in what is considered African. Phindile refers to this by stating "if Africans today feel that it (same-sex sexuality) is not of them, for whatever reason, I don't want to take away their ability to say 'this is not us'". For participants, if the variability of African identity is acknowledged, it will allow for the emergence of differing constructions of what is considered an African identity. In that way a construction of same-sex sexuality as un-African could coexist with a view that regards it as African. Sibongile argued for opening up the dialogue of how African sexualities are defined by stating "there cannot be one definition of things where certain things are African and others are un-African". Opening up discussions about what African sexualities encompass is regarded by participants as countering the silencing mechanism of a discourse of same-sex sexuality being un-African. For participants, such an approach creates conversations instead of closing them off and in that way creates spaces for different constructions of African identities and sexualities to become available.

Participants spoke of a discourse of same-sex sexuality as un-African as functioning in two main ways. Firstly, they regard it as serving a political function in that it creates a valued African identity that is separate from Western influence. In post-colonial political discourse many African leaders have drawn on a construction of an African identity that is culturally proud and resistant to interference by the West (Hoad, 2007). Rejecting same-sex sexuality as a Western influence and a threat to African cultural identity is then a commonly used strategy by political leaders to affirm a shared African identity (Hoad, 2007). It serves to bolster a construction of a preferred African identity – one that values traditional African structures and resists Western interference. Sibongile comments on how the current focus on defining an African identity in particular ways (through amongst others shunning same-sex sexuality) is seen as being part of a post-colonial reclaiming of identity:

I think perhaps people [consider same-sex sexuality as un-African] because it's a... by being able to claim something as your own, be it land, a name, a monument or whatever, you are in a position of power. And I found that a lot of black people have used that to almost emancipate themselves in their minds from apartheid and slavery, to feel empowered in a sense.... So I think it's a way of empowering yourself as an individual. And some people need that to heal, you need to feel as though you're above the white man, suddenly. To feel like a person.... So they deem whatever doesn't fit with their ideas as wrong, and they are self-righteous and they know what's right.... Hence they shun homosexuals and call it wrong and blasphemous and all of that.

A discourse of same-sex sexuality as un-African then functions here to privilege a certain construction of African identity in post-Apartheid South Africa.

A second way in which a construction of same-sex sexuality as un-African functions is through supporting a patriarchal construction of female sexuality. Sibongile comments on the selective use or appropriation of cultural discourses, particularly so by powerful individuals such as Jacob Zuma and other political figures, to reinforce notions of accepted male sexuality (and unaccepted female sexuality). Sibongile describes how Jacob Zuma's sexuality is seen by many as a culturally valued sexuality. She goes on to note that in many instances cultural norms are reinterpreted by powerful male figures to protect male privilege and patriarchy, through appeals to norms that are not necessarily practiced according to their historical use but are instead adapted to continue to serve male interest¹³. While norms around male sexuality are protected by a marked flexibility in the interpretation of cultural values, female sexuality is not afforded the same privilege. An active

¹³ Jacob Zuma's performance of his masculinity has been described as a reassertion of patriarchal traditionalism where he calls on a traditional Zulu identity in support of his views on polygamy and female sexuality (Hunter, 2011; Robins, 2006). While his polygamous marriages are legally recognised and culturally sanctioned in South Africa, his own practice does not strictly conform to historical Zulu cultural prescriptions of polygamy. For example, he has publicly admitted to having sexual relationships with women outside of his formally recognised marriages, such as during his rape trial where he stated that he had consensual sex with his accuser (Evans & Wolmarans, 2006). Non-marital sex was not allowed in pre-colonial Zulu contexts and in some instances could even lead to punishment by death (Delius & Glaser, 2004). Similarly, when in a polygamous marriage having non-marital sex was also frowned upon. Current debates that draw on cultural practices to validate polygamous marriages point to a selective use of culture, in that notions of culture are drawn on in flexible ways to justify and maintain male privilege.

female sexuality (through the defiance of heteronormativity)¹⁴ is not approved of and is regarded un-African, as it threatens patriarchal cultural configurations of sexuality:

Sibongile: There are a number of things that are un-African, within the definition of what most people use for what is African. For example, I just think of Zuma and all these marriages, and a number of things, they are un-African, in that traditional sense. But it's accepted because well, he's a man and all of that.

A patriarchal orientation towards women as subservient to men is so entrenched that in many African communities female same-sex sexuality is not only seen in light of it being “deviant” sexually but is also regarded as a transgression of a woman’s gendered position in communities. Women are expected to submit to men and assume a passive role - being involved with another woman is then often regarded as desiring to be like a man. The extent to which female same-sex sexuality is regarded as a threat to women’s gendered position is apparent in the phenomenon of some men practicing corrective rape. Corrective rape is where lesbian women are targeted in sexual assaults where the perpetrator has the aim of using rape to “cure” their victim of their same-sex orientation (Actionaid, n.d.; Britton, 2006; Muholi, 2004). Victims often report that during the attack their perpetrators tell them that they are being “taught a lesson” and being “shown how to be real women” (Actionaid, n.d., p. 12). While media reports focus on lesbian women as the victims of corrective rape, bisexual women are of course also at risk as any indication of involvement with a woman makes them vulnerable, regardless of whether they identify as lesbian or bisexual. Sibongile refers to her awareness of such risk of physical violence or even death when she states that if you are seen with another woman “you’re putting your life in danger really”. Corrective rape is fuelled by strong sanctions against women’s transgression of their prescribed gendered role, and therefore also relates to gender non-conformity, and not only deviation from heterosexuality (Currier, 2011).

Participants contrasted their experience and expression of their sexuality in terms of how white and black bisexual women share common ground, but also face different challenges. While white South African women also risk various forms of marginalisation and victimisation when coming out as bisexual or lesbian, the phenomenon of corrective rape is generally restricted to rural and semi-rural

¹⁴ Male same-sex sexuality is also considered un-African by many, but the point I am making here is that it is male *heterosexual* privilege that is protected by a selective interpretation of culture, while female sexuality is not afforded the same malleability in terms of the interpretation of cultural practices and values.

black communities¹⁵. Sibongile spoke about how her awareness of this influences the extent to which she can freely express her sexuality:

I've never heard of a white lesbian being killed by a community. So just thinking about that, and in that frame of mind it is then different you know, to be a black lesbian, bisexual, whatever, because your reality is just a little different. Because we form part of larger communities. I'm not always here at varsity, I'm not always back home in my little suburb, I'm not always there. We form part of a larger community, when there are funerals or our families live in townships or things like that. So when we have to go there, you're gonna meet people who think they can straighten a woman by raping them. And I do think about that, that's why you do need to be discerning if I am seeing someone, for example, we cannot walk around holding hands, or kiss in public, or things like that.

A discourse of same-sex sexuality as un-African then also functions as a mechanism to regulate female sexuality. Engaging in same-sex relationships is regarded as a challenge to patriarchal arrangements of femininity and female sexuality, while male (hetero)sexuality enjoys relative protection from cultural sanctions through greater flexibility in the application of what is considered African.

7.4.2 Same-sex sexuality as sin

Another powerful discourse that was present in the text in instances where same-sex sexuality was condemned, was a discourse of same-sex sexuality as sin. All the participants indicated that they grew up in homes where Christian teachings informed their upbringing and their views of sexuality. In addition to this, as noted in the literature review in Chapter 4, most South Africans were exposed to Christian doctrine during apartheid, not only in religious contexts but also on the level of political ideology, pedagogy and socialisation. South African schools, for example, followed a curriculum based on a system of Christian National Education, where Christianity explicitly and implicitly informed education and socialisation in schools (Chidester, 2003). Religious discourse, and in particular Christianity, has then played an influential role in shaping participants' views of sexuality and also contributed to how sexuality is viewed by the communities of which they form part.

Participants commented on the manner in which Christianity is integrated into institutions and regulates social life on various levels, with the implication that religious constructions of what is

¹⁵ Research by the Triangle Project found that 86% of black lesbians in South Africa report that they fear being victims of sexual violence, compared to 44% of white lesbians reporting the same (Rich, 2006).

considered a valued and “normal” sexuality are very influential and circulate widely. Taryn refers to this when she states:

I don't have a problem with Christianity but the fact that it's not separated from society, in that people run their businesses based on Christian principles and things like that, people have one mind set and it's sort of imposed on you.

She continues to relate it to a religious disapproval of same-sex sexuality permeating social institutions, stating “it's the same with sexuality. It's even worse, because of the huge Christian aspect, where homosexuality is not cool”.

In this discussion I first focus on the various ways in which religious discourse constructs same-sex sexuality, before considering how these constructions impact on participants' own view of their sexuality as well as how they negotiate disclosure of their sexual identification with their families. I conclude with a discussion of counter-discourses offered by participants where their sexuality is not in conflict with their religious or spiritual beliefs.

During the interviews, religious discourse was generally described as disapproving of same-sex sexuality. While public discourses around same-sex sexuality might be evolving to be more accepting, “rhetoric around homosexuality as ‘sinful’, ‘morally wrong’, ‘sick’, ‘unnatural’ or ‘deviant’ is well established in both psychological and public discourse” and such rhetoric is still drawn on in efforts to undermine the legitimacy of same-sex sexuality (Ellis & Kitzinger, 2000, p. 171). Many of the participants referred to how they have been exposed to such a discourse of same-sex sexuality as sinful and unnatural, based on Biblical interpretations of same-sex sexuality. They described how they were exposed to this discourse from a young age and that it was never questioned. Sonia refers to this when she says “my parents were very, you know, staunch church-going people, and you know ‘the Bible says homosexuality is wrong’ and things like that. So we were raised in a certain way”. Sonia goes on to relate the Christian discourse to which she was exposed whilst growing up with the dominance of heterosexuality:

It's not okay to be gay or bisexual and it's an abomination in God's eyes... so I want to almost say that it's the whole Christianity thing that made everyone believe that there really is only one option for you, which is to be straight.

Belinda spoke about how when she was young a discourse of same-sex sexuality being sinful was also reinforced at school:

In the primary school assembly they gave a sermon around how wrong homosexuality is. But to like small kids, and basically telling the kids about how gay people were going to burn in hell, and all of that. So this little girl started crying, and was so upset because now she thought that her uncle who was gay was going to be tortured and burned in hell because of being gay.

In addition to constructing same-sex sexuality as sinful, this discourse also constructs it as an unnatural sexuality that is equated with a harmful lifestyle. Sonia refers to this when she speaks about how homosexuality is presented in current interpretations of the Bible in the same light as bestiality and sexual orgies: “You know they make it this uber destructive hellish kind of sex lust thing, and that's not what it is at all, but that's how people interpret it”. Jacobs (1993) refers to this as “scourge rhetoric”, where notions of immorality are used to depict same-sex sexuality as a “moral disease” (p. 729). This construction draws on Biblical references to homosexuality in the context of Levitical defilement laws. As discussed in Chapter 4, the focus in these verses was on possible defilement during male-male intercourse; however the condemnation of male homosexuality in these ancient laws as well as in Paul’s letters to the Romans is commonly extended to female same-sex sexuality. Sonia goes on to refer to how homosexuality has been equated with destructive behaviour where it is linked to sexual violence in Biblical verses:

I think it might be in the New Testament already, I'm not sure, where one of the disciples or someone's son gets sodomised in the street, it's a very nasty terrible thing, and from there onwards it becomes this thing of you will not be homosexual.

In such a construction same-sex sexuality is associated with sexual violence, destruction and moral decay.

Such a construction of same-sex sexuality as sinful and harmful compels certain social actions, in that religious discourse positions individuals who identify as lesbian or bisexual as requiring religious intervention. In such a discourse, the assumption is that “sexual orientation is a matter of individual choice and that gays should be encouraged to make ‘better’ choices” and helped to “change their ‘lifestyles’” (Green, 2000, p. 125). Phindile refers to the frequent response to her bisexuality by Christian friends: “Their response has been sort of ‘you need help, come speak to my pastor at

church', or something along the lines of 'we'll pray for you'". In this manner same-sex sexuality is regarded as a sin that can be overcome, as Belinda comments on the view others hold when they state "it is wrong, but you know, Christianity can help you". Other participants spoke of experiences where religious interventions were used to exorcise an individual's homosexuality:

Sonia: A friend of mine was kicked out of the house when she was 16 (when she disclosed her sexuality); her parents literally told her that they're sorry but they can't accept it, but not to worry because they will pray for her. They kept her in the house for a week to do exorcisms on her.

Participants recounted their personal struggle with making sense of their bisexuality due to their internalisation of religious discourse constructing same-sex sexuality as sinful and destructive. They described feeling guilty and conflicted as many of them identified with Christian teachings but could not reconcile them with their feelings of same-sex attraction. Nadia refers to this when she says:

If you're raised in a Christian home everyone moves in that direction (of disapproving of same-sex sexuality), and those social constructs make you feel guilty because they tell you from a young age that if you sin you will be punished.

Sonia and Liné also refer to the conflict they felt in making sense of their sexuality in relation to their Christian upbringing:

Liné: So for me, that was also obviously a struggle, the religious background of it. What do you now suddenly say to God about it all? Because the Bible says homosexuality is wrong.

Sonia: I started to become very conflicted with things like Christianity versus being who I am, and who will accept me and you know that whole story of... ah there are so many struggles you have to go through just to get to a place where you're okay and you accept that who you are is who you are.

Phindile spoke about feeling as if she cannot consider herself a Christian and at the same time identify as gay or bisexual:

[When I was younger] I started these Bible classes, and I decided, because you know religion says you have to be straight, basically. So I was like, okay cool, then I'm straight. You know I can't be... I can't remember if at that time I defined myself as gay or bi, but I wasn't straight.

But while I attended these classes I wasn't gay, I was straight. And I was so unhappy, it was hard so I decided no, actually I'm not. I'm attracted to girls and so then I'm not Christian. So I would reject one or the other.

For participants the impact of religious discourse's disapproval of same-sex sexuality was strongly felt in their interactions with their families. Firstly, they describe how it functions as one of the main deterrents in disclosing their sexual identification to their families, particularly so when their families are very religious. Secondly, participants often spoke about religious proscriptions against same-sex sexuality being one of the main reasons for their parents not accepting them after disclosure:

Sonia: And the religion thing also troubled my mother for very long, so she's religious, she's a Christian yes. She said a while back, we had a huge fight, it was when I had my last girlfriend and I was on my way to her again and we just had this enormous fight and my mother said to me, but she was screaming at me, and we never have scream fights, understand my family is actually very peaceful, there are no things like that. And she screamed at me 'I can't accept it, how can you expect me to accept it?'

While religious disapproval of same-sex sexuality functions as a powerful discourse in participants' lives, they also indicated that they were able to formulate a counter-discourse through challenging contemporary interpretations of religious discourse. Despite generally identifying with religious teachings and valuing aspects of their Christian upbringing, most of the participants indicated that at some point they started a process of questioning rigidly interpreted religious discourse. This occurred in a number of ways. Firstly, participants grew disillusioned with organised religion as it has, historically, supported oppressive systems such as apartheid. Astrid spoke about the involvement of the Dutch Reformed church in apartheid and how her increasing awareness of religious complicity in racial oppression during that time in South African history caused her to question her own religious position: "The fact that the church would support apartheid just pissed me off, and I basically denounced the church when I started realising what was going on". Phindile also spoke about historical interpretations of the Bible having contributed to oppression based on race, and how her awareness thereof has made her assume a more critical approach towards religion: "Like if I was living in the fourteen hundreds I wouldn't go to heaven because I'm black. If I'm living today I'm not going to heaven because I date girls".

Secondly, participants indicated that Biblical interpretations that have contributed to women's oppression have also caused them to become critical of Christianity, in that Biblical texts have been

used to justify women's subordination to men. Phindile refers to this when she says "I've had quite a few struggles with my religion, not just with sexuality but also with the treatment of women". Lastly, participants' critical approach to religious discourse is also informed by their views of the damage participants believe religious discourse has done to gay and bisexual identified individuals. Sonia spoke about how religious positioning of gay and bisexual identified individuals as sinful and deviant is "hurtful and destructive". This has led them to assume positions that challenge the construction in religious discourse of same-sex sexuality as sinful.

Participants described going through a process of questioning and rearticulating the religious teachings to which they were exposed during their upbringing, to the point that they all described themselves as now being comfortable with their sexuality as it relates to their faith or spirituality. Some participants described themselves as Christian, while other participants distanced themselves from a Christian position and rejected organised religion. In those cases they described themselves as being spiritual instead of religious. However, all of the participants spoke about feeling comfortable with their sexuality in relation to religious or spiritual beliefs:

Astrid: I will still say that I'm spiritual, I won't say that I'm NG¹⁶ Christian at all, but I feel completely guilt free and I feel that I'm cool with God and God is cool with me, whoever that might be. And my girlfriend and myself are actually both very spiritual, and we're spiritual in our relationship. So, that makes it alright for me, you know.

Nadia: God is so much bigger than people standing in a church. So that's pretty much my view on religion, and I don't think for a moment that Jesus will be angry at me if I'm a lesbian (laughs).

Sonia: I can say with full comfort and certainty that the Christianity/gay thing doesn't bother me anymore at all.

Participants' main point of resistance to religious discourse's disapproval of same-sex sexuality is their disagreement with the construction of same-sex sexuality as destructive. Participants referred to the previously discussed interpretations of Biblical verses equating same-sex sexuality with sexual violence and moral decay. Participants offered a counter-discourse where their same-sex relationships are constructed as loving and respectful. In this counter-discourse, a same-sex relationship cannot be seen as going against Biblical instruction if it is based on love and a desire to

¹⁶ NG refers to the *Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk* or the Dutch Reformed Church.

avoid harm. Laetitia describes this in the following way: “how can a God of love ever reject you or send you to hell for just loving? I mean, you’re not doing anyone any harm”. Liné and Sonia also emphasised their resistance to a construction of same-sex relationships as destructive, according to religious discourse:

Liné: How can you say that (same-sex sexuality) is necessarily wrong, if it’s something that’s beautiful and pure, in your mind? And all you want to do is have the best for that person and be with them, and love them and cherish them, and all they want to do is do that same thing for you? How can you say that is wrong? Because God is love, God is nothing else.

Sonia: At the end of the day I feel like I am a good person, you know I do as much good as I can to be a good person in terms of not living destructively and not harming people, you know, things like that, to as far as possible limit pain, and that's part of it. By being gay or bisexual I am not being destructive in any way....

This section focused on two silencing discourses that function to close off conversations about same-sex sexuality. It can be highlighted again that participants seldom explicitly named bisexuality when discussing these two discourses, instead focusing on same-sex sexuality. It is possible that bisexuality not being explicitly named in these discourses relates to participants’ general tendency in the interviews to focus not on their relationships and connections with men, but on their relationships with women. Therefore it might also be that in the statements included in this section of the analysis, that participants’ focus was more on what is seen as “abnormal” by society (their relationships with women) and therefore they focused their discussion on same-sex sexuality. It is also possible that this is related to the absence of the word bisexuality in religious texts such as the Bible, which would explain why religious discourse more generally focuses on homosexuality and not bisexuality. Similarly, despite the fact that black participants in this study identified as bisexual, it is not a term that is widely available in black communities¹⁷ and might therefore also not be highly visible in discourses around African identity.

¹⁷ I indicated in the literature review that in many African contexts the terms “gay” and “lesbian” have received increasing attention. However “bisexual” is not often used by black Africans and South Africans when describing their sexual identification, and authors writing about African sexualities also generally neglect using the term.

7.5 Normalising discourses

The discourses presented thus far generally act to dismiss bisexuality as a category of sexual identification and marginalise women who claim such an identity. In this section I discuss two normalising discourses drawn on by participants in efforts to retrieve bisexuality from a discursive space where it is rendered unintelligible, delegitimised and silenced.

I first discuss a discourse of a universal bisexual potential that constructs bisexuality as normal and natural. I then discuss a discourse of bisexuality not being a choice in that it is biologically predetermined, where participants draw on this discourse to validate their identity as bisexual.

7.5.1 “A little bit of bisexuality exists in all of us”: Claiming a universal bisexual potential

This discourse was drawn on by participants in support of a construction of bisexuality as normal and natural. In this discourse bisexuality is constructed as a universal potential for attraction to both sexes that most, if not all, people share. Taryn describes this potential when she states “I feel that bisexuality is something that a lot of us share and that only a few of us acknowledge and explore”. Taryn goes on to explain this further:

I feel like very few people are at either extreme where they are completely heterosexual or completely gay, and can be sure of the fact that they are at either extreme. So I guess a little bit of bisexuality exists in all of us.... I just can't understand how it's not a normal state of being, bisexuality.

A discourse of a universal bisexual potential supports a view of sexuality as fluid. Within this discourse sexual desire and romantic love are viewed as being able to flow in more than one direction (Pell, 2002). An inherent bisexual potential implies that it is possible for someone, regardless of their self-conscious sexual orientation, to experience variation in the direction of their sexual feelings (Diamond, 2008). Taryn refers to this when she describes how she has experienced attraction to and love for men and women:

Having been with both sexes, it's totally possible to love a man or to love a woman. And it's totally possible to be sexual with a man or with a woman. For me sex has always been an extension of my love for someone, and whether they are male or female, sex can be great either way, if you love that person. So I have no doubt that it's possible to love either gender.... It really, to me it seems quite normal.

This discourse normalises bisexuality by positing that fluid attraction is more common than most people would consider it to be. It counters the notion of bisexuality as pathological or deviant through constructing it as something that exists in everybody. The suppression of one's bisexual potential is instead what is considered pathological or harmful – Taryn refers to this in the following statement: “So many people will go there in their mind, and never for whatever reason, I think usually because of social judgment, don't really ever explore it. And might actually end up being happier if they had”. Laetitia refers to the “insanities” caused by being forced to commit to either a heterosexual or homosexual orientation. In drawing on this normalising discourse, participants invert the dominant construction of bisexuality as pathological and instead position themselves as normal, healthy and fulfilled.

This construction echoes aspects of a Freudian view of bisexual potential, or polymorphous sexuality, where individuals are considered to be born with an innate undifferentiated bisexuality, which is only directed towards exclusive heterosexuality or homosexuality during the psychosexual maturation that occurs during puberty (Freud, 1937/1963). However, participants describe this differentiation into a heterosexual or homosexual identity as the result of societal pressure to conform to one of the two socially recognised categories of sexuality, and not due to a Freudian explanation of a developmental path to a “mature” sexuality. A universal bisexual potential is constructed by participants as a natural propensity to be attracted to and love either men or women, but this propensity is stifled during socialisation and through the dominance of a heterosexual/homosexual binary. Laetitia describes this in the following way:

I really think that in people, both sides exist. But I think that one gets raised with... I mean you really get trained from a young age to be a certain thing. You get raised as a girl and girls like boys, or you get raised as a boy and boys do this, and you get a list of criteria. But I think that in essence both sides exist in all of us. I think it is just your nurturing that determines what you will then eventually do.... Some people have been conditioned so badly that they won't even consider it.

Authors such as Pell (2002) have pointed out that a view of bisexuality as innate risks exposing bisexuality to the same essentialising treatment that many bisexually-identified women are in fact attempting to resist. Appealing to a universal bisexual potential that is inherent to everyone, positions bisexuality as a core identity that exists prior to the effects of discourse on shaping sexuality. By naturalising bisexuality and pathologising the repression of it, a view of bisexuality as essential and innate is perpetuated (Pell, 2002). However, participants' accounts emphasised a

construction of such a universal bisexual potential as creating *options* for sexual identification, where it does not imply that bisexuality should be the only category of identification. Instead the potential for sexual fluidity is regarded as allowing for variation in how people express their sexuality. Bisexual potential is constructed as a general openness to experience that extends beyond sexuality and such an openness allows participants to choose to act on feelings of attraction, instead of limiting themselves to an exclusive heterosexual or homosexual orientation. This was illustrated by Sonia when we discussed, during the interview, how children who are raised to be flexible about their sexuality can eventually have greater freedom in their expression of sexual variation as adults:

Ingrid: I think that it can become a choice in that sense...

Sonia: Ja if we're all raised bisexual.

Ingrid: If you can feel free from a young age that you can express yourself...

Sonia: Ja and to just explore, if you don't like it (bisexuality) then fine, just be open to it because you can just be so much happier if you give yourself a chance, because we limit ourselves and that's the sickest thing you can do. Limit yourself, really? The idea is that you will give yourself as much space as possible to grow in and we choose to limit ourselves and it's almost like a paradox, it's almost masochistic in a way. So I agree with you fully, either way I will raise my children to make a choice about it.

In this sense a discourse of a universal bisexual potential constructs sexual orientation as a choice where an inherent bisexual predisposition allows individuals to vary the direction of their sexual desire and affection throughout their lives. Sonia refers to this when she equates bisexuality with not "limiting yourself". Astrid refers to this when she states "for me it's a decision". She goes on to say that despite having had some negative experiences with men, she decided not to be "anti-men" and instead chose to remain open to an attraction to both men or women.

7.5.2 "I don't think it's a choice": Bisexuality as biologically predetermined

A second normalising discourse that was drawn on by participants is that of bisexuality not being a choice, in that sexual orientation is regarded as biologically predetermined and fixed. This discourse resists the position advanced in the previous discourse of a universal bisexual potential, where sexual orientation is constructed as a choice that individuals make. As indicated in the literature review, competing explanations for the development of sexual orientation exist where a nature/nurture dichotomy is often drawn on – biological explanations regard sexual orientation as pre-determined and not based on personal choice ("nature"), while cultural explanations regard it as more malleable and open to intervention ("nurture"), through for example psychological therapies.

In the latter construction sexual orientation is then seen, at least to some extent, as a choice (Sedgwick, 1993). The current discourse challenges such a view and constructs sexual orientation as not based on individual choice.

Participants mostly drew on such a discourse, of bisexuality as biologically predetermined, in the context of reflecting on challenges to their identification as bisexual. During the interviews participants recounted being confronted by the idea that they can change their sexual orientation and that they could “become straight” if they tried hard enough. Sonia describes how her parents constructed her attraction to women as a choice she had made and that therefore she could change her sexual orientation by resisting that choice:

When my parents found out (about my girlfriend), I hit this enormous depression because they refused to accept me and took away my phone and my dad refused to pay for my sport and I didn't get pocket money and all these things to kind of force me into being straight.... And my dad came to me and he said 'how can't you change this?' and he told me how he knew I could change it and he started crying and it was the first time that I saw my dad crying. But you know he felt so intensely that I could change this thing and I was just like 'no! I can't! I have been trying for the past how many years, I can't!'

Sonia illustrates here how a discourse of bisexuality as biologically predetermined functions to resist challenges to participants' sexual identification, particularly in response to an attribution of blame for identifying with a non-normative sexuality. Sonia emphasises this when she refers to being “punished” for being in a same-sex relationship in an attempt to “force (her) into being straight”. Nasiphi echoes this when she says:

I don't think you choose to be bisexual.... I think it's something that's in you; it's just something that you feel and you can't try to hide from it or try to change it. I don't think it's a choice at all.

During the interviews this discourse of bisexuality as biologically predetermined was drawn on in two ways. Firstly, participants attempted to trace the “origins” of their same-sex feelings, and secondly they drew on biological explanations of the development of sexual orientation. In tracing the origins of their feelings of same-sex attraction, participants engaged in a process of retrospectively looking for “evidence” of their bisexuality in their younger selves. Kitzinger and Wilkinson (1995, p. 101) refer to such a process of “retrospective accounting” where participants in

their study, who initially identified as heterosexual but later transitioned to a lesbian identity, engaged in a “reconstruction of a past that offers a sense of continuity with the present”, through recollections of previously forgotten or dismissed same-sex attraction and experiences. Participants in the current study similarly recounted moments where they experienced their first feelings of same-sex attraction as “signs” of their inherent bisexuality. Laetitia refers to this when she says “if I look back now I’m like ‘whoa!’ because then I can clearly see the signs from long ago”. Sibongile describes her feelings of attraction to men and women as always having been part of her when she says “it was always there”. Liné recounts her first awareness of same-sex feelings when she was younger:

And so I started looking back and I had a best friend in school, and we were incredibly close...
And I would think of us getting dressed in the room - I would sit and watch her. At that stage I didn’t realise why I was watching, but now that I look back I realise, oh my God, but you were appreciating her nudity, but you wouldn’t admit it to yourself at that stage. So yes, it’s half...
Then one starts to realise it’s actually always been there, but you just never recognised it.

Sonia also describes her attempts to trace the origins of her same-sex feelings and concludes that she has always felt different from others, based on her attraction to women as well as men:

In primary school I dated boys too... But I knew that there was something different from grade one, I mean in grade one I fell in love with my standard five prefect and I remember watching their revue video over and over and over just to see her and I was just like ‘but why doesn’t anyone else feel like that?’ You know?... Why do I like my best girl friend more than most other people like their best girl friends?

By tracing the origins of their bisexuality, participants reconstruct their pasts and normalise their sexuality through positing it as something that has always been part of them. By describing their bisexuality as “always having been there” it is constructed as something that is inherent to participants, that has always existed in them but that they could only articulate once they were older and had a frame of reference for understanding it. Drawing on this essentialist discourse serves to minimise societal blame for participants’ “deviant” sexuality, in that if bisexuality has always existed within them, it is not something they chose. Here a construction of inherent bisexuality is drawn on very differently compared to how it functioned in the previous discourse of a universal bisexual potential. The emphasis here is on participants’ perception of bisexuality as something that formed part of them even before their awareness of it, and therefore as something that they did not choose.

A second way in which participants' sexual identification is normalised in this discourse of bisexuality as predetermined, is through appealing to biological explanations for the development of same-sex feelings. Many arguments have been put forward in support of a biological basis for sexual orientation, where sexual orientation is seen as biologically predisposed and fixed across one's lifespan (Hegarty, 2002). These arguments draw on studies that report on the influence of pre-natal hormones (Ehrhardt et al., 1985), genetic contributions (Hamer, Hu, Magnuson, Hu, & Pattatucci, 1993) and differences in brain structures (LeVay, 1991), amongst others. For participants, biological explanations for the development of sexual orientation function to normalise and destigmatise bisexuality. If their sexual orientation is the result of their biology, then they cannot be blamed or judged for it. Bisexuality is then not a choice and it is not something that is under their personal control. Taryn refers to such biological explanations when she states the following:

There are so many facets, I mean things like if you are exposed to too much testosterone in the womb you might end up being gay. How do you have any control over something like that?

Taryn goes on to say:

[If it] was a choice maybe it would be different, but it's not a choice. To hate people because of something that is not even of their own choosing is just wrong man.

Sonia speaks of her own experience of discovering that pre-natal hormonal influences could have affected the development of her sexual orientation, and her emotional response of relief at the possibility that she did not "choose" her sexual orientation:

My mom told me one day.... that her first pregnancy miscarried and when she fell pregnant again the doctor gave her hormones so that she could keep me. And I don't know if it had an influence at all, but I think it may have gotten through to her that it could have perhaps... And for me it was a huge relief, because for me it was that thing of 'thank you, it's not my fault, I really can't help it'. Because I thought about it many times to just fight it one more time, just one more time and then I try and I become this deeply unhappy person. So when that came out I just thought 'ah, thank you'. Just this one thing that made it not my fault...

In this account, Sonia illustrates how a discourse of bisexuality as biologically predetermined can function to absolve blame (when she states "it's not my fault") and normalise her sexual identification. Participants, however, also assumed resistant positions in relation to biological

explanations for the development of sexual orientation. The heteronormative lens frequently employed in studies researching the development of sexual orientation has the consequence that such studies typically approach same-sex orientations in terms of an “‘excess’, ‘deficiency’ or ‘imbalance’” in relation to the accepted norm of heterosexual development (Sedgwick, 1993, p. 79). This was also seen in participants’ statements such as Taryn’s reference to exposure to “too much testosterone” being linked to same-sex sexuality. Sedgwick (1993) presents a well-articulated response to the negative terms in which same-sex development is constructed in many biological explanations:

If I had ever, in any medium, seen any researcher or populariser refer even once to any supposed gay-producing circumstance as the *proper* hormone balance, or the *conducive* endocrine environment, for gay generation, I would be less chilled by the breezes of all this technological confidence. (p. 79, emphasis in original)

Participants were critical of biological explanations of sexual orientation being used to further discriminate against same-sex orientations. They referred to scientific discourses that propose genetic manipulation to eliminate “undesirable” sexual orientations, similar to what some geneticists predicted when speculating about the existence of a “gay gene” (Sedgwick, 1993). Astrid refers to this when she states that in this approach there is a possibility of people responding in the following way: “it’s like ‘your foetus is going to be gay, let’s kill it’. I mean it’s an extreme way of saying it but that’s what could happen if you fucking go there, so like don’t go there”.

Participants also resisted an over reliance on biological explanations where it was seen as simplifying sexual orientation by reducing it to biologically predetermined influences. In such a construction individual agency is removed. Astrid and Taryn refer to this when they state the following:

Taryn: I just don’t think it’s that straightforward. You can’t just say it’s a genetic thing, you know.

Astrid: I would hate if they fucking said that. I’d be like ‘fuck you, I can’t think for myself’?

Participants highlight here how biological explanations can frame sexual orientation in a deterministic manner, where individual choice is erased.

In this section I focused on normalising discourses, where I explored the strategies used by participants to retrieve bisexuality from a discursive space of invalidation and delegitimation. To

this end I first discussed a discourse of universal bisexual potential that posits that a propensity for attraction to both men and women exists in everyone. This discourse constructs sexual orientation as fluid and as changing over the course of one's life. It normalises bisexuality through constructing it as more common than is generally acknowledged. It also normalises bisexuality through depicting monosexuality as pathological, in that it requires of individuals to limit themselves to either a heterosexual or homosexual orientation.

I also discussed a discourse of bisexuality as biologically predetermined. This discourse constructs bisexuality as not being a choice and serves to normalise bisexuality in that it removes personal blame for sexual orientations that deviate from the heterosexual norm. In this manner many of the participants described that biological explanations for the development of sexual orientation served to destigmatise their own identification as bisexual, as they are not regarded as responsible for their sexual identification if it is biologically predetermined. However, a discourse of bisexuality as predetermined also contributes to an essentialist view of sexual orientation in that it posits sexuality as a fixed and inherent characteristic that is unchanging over an individual's life span. Finally, it can be noted that a discourse of bisexuality as biologically predetermined is in contrast with the position drawn on by participants when discussing the discourse of a universal bisexual potential, which described sexual orientation as a choice individuals make.

7.6 Conclusion

This chapter concluded the presentation and discussion of the findings of the discourse analysis, where I discussed eight groupings of discourses that in various ways impact on participants' positioning as bisexual. From the discussion of these discourses it becomes clear that claiming a bisexual identity requires careful discursive manoeuvring. Participants have to negotiate dominant discourses of valued or privileged subjectivities in an attempt to legitimise and validate their own position in discourse. Claiming a bisexual identity is at times complicated and risks marginalisation in the face of delegitimising discourses that construct participants in negative terms of promiscuity and hypersexuality. Claiming such an identity is further complicated by the relative invisibility of bisexuality in relation to a heterosexual/homosexual binary. As a result participants are faced with asserting the legitimacy of their sexual identification and creating bisexual visibility, while at the same time resisting negative positioning in relation to dominant discourses.

The Derridean notion of undecidables becomes useful in considering participants' positioning in relation to dominant discourses of sex, gender and sexuality. It is possible that the discursive anxiety

caused by bisexuality's challenge to dominant discourses may contribute to its delegitimation and unintelligibility, where bisexuality is not considered a viable category of sexual identification and bisexual individuals are assigned as either gay or straight to avoid the confusion of oppositional categories. Collins (2005) notes that the threat to oppositional categories posed by undecidables compels a need to re-establish order. In reference to the zombie motif as an undecidable, he states that the "troubling element" has to be eliminated by killing it. He continues:

[But] zombies are already dead (while alive). You can't kill a zombie, you have to resolve it. It has to be 'killed' categorically, by removing its undecidability.... Returning it to one side of the opposition or the other. It has to become a proper corpse or a true living being. (Collins, 2005, p. 23)

Similarly, bisexuality might compel a discursive correction through assigning individuals as either gay or straight, in the face of its challenge to dominant discourses. Such discursive correction was evident in the sections of the analysis that dealt with the unintelligibility of bisexuality, notably in the sections on discourses that position bisexuality in terms of confusion or indecision, and the accompanying incitement to "choose a side". Participants' engagement with normalising discourses can perhaps be interpreted as a response to such correction, where they endeavour to retrieve their identification as bisexual from illegitimacy. From the analysis it then appears that the potential for bisexuality to act as an undecidable is frustrated when bisexuality is "forced" to one or the other side of the opposition, through the discursive "correction" of troubling instances.

I take up this debate again in the following and final chapter, where I consider the potential for bisexuality to subvert binary categories.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

8.1 Introduction

In this final chapter I first provide a brief summary of the findings of the present study, before revisiting the research questions that this study aimed to address. In particular, I consider a central problematic of the study – that of the potential for bisexuality to challenge dominant discourses of sex, gender and sexuality. Finally, I comment on the limitations of the study and provide suggestions for future research focused on female bisexuality and related areas of study.

8.2 Summary of the findings

In presenting the findings of the discourse analysis, I made use of a framework that organises the findings into eight groupings of discourses related to how participants account for their gendered and sexualised subjectivity in the interview texts. In this section I briefly summarise these eight groupings.

8.2.1 Sexuality as identity

This section was concerned with participants' engagement with a discourse of sexuality as identity. While participants negotiate their identity in a discursive context where sexuality is regarded as defining subjectivity and as creating different "types" of people, they resisted the manner in which such a discursive context posits bisexuality as being primary to their identity. Drawing on a counter discourse that emphasises the intersectionality of identity, they were able to enact various strategies that downplay the significance of their identification as bisexual in their descriptions of themselves. In this manner participants challenged the salience of sexuality in constructions of identity.

I also discussed how participants make sense of their identities in a context of post-apartheid South Africa and a resistance to identity politics. Participants' resistance to fixing their identity along strictly defined categories of identity was partly informed by a view of such categories as oppressive. In this context, participants were critical of rigidly constructed lines of difference, such as the boundaries around race and sexuality. Their reluctance to privilege certain aspects of identity, such as their identification as bisexual, was constructed in relation to such a political resistance of reified categories of identity.

8.2.2 Discourses of gendered difference

In this section I focused on participants' engagement with discourses of gendered difference. Participants drew on a discourse that rejects gendered difference, in this way constructing the notion of gender as informing differentiation between people as arbitrary. Further to this, they drew on a discourse of romantic androgyny to define their attraction to others as removed from male/female categories. In this sense participants challenged the automatic linking of sex, gender and sexual desire. However, participants also demonstrated the pervasive effects of dominant discourse in the gendered positioning of subjects. This was illustrated in a construction of relationships with men along a traditional male/female binary, positioning participants as passive feminine subjects in relation to their male partners. In contrast to this, relationships with women were regarded as sites of resistance to the traditional gender binary in that participants are able to blur the strict allocation of gendered roles when in a same-sex relationship.

8.2.3 Bisexuality and a butch/femme dichotomy

This section was concerned with participants' treatment of notions of femininity when reflecting on their own gendered identities as bisexual women. Participants drew on traditional beauty ideals in constructing a "femme" identity, associated with bisexual identities, and evoked a construction of a "butch dyke", associated with lesbian identities. The butch dyke was considered as troubling the "natural" gender order and threatening participants' precarious position in discourse, where they themselves are sexual "others". Through ascribing to a femme bisexual identity, as opposed to what they construct as a marginalised and othered butch lesbian identity, participants' accounts indicate an attempt to preserve their relative protection in dominant discourse.

8.2.4 Heteronormativity and bisexuality

In this section I focused on how heteronormativity, as a powerful societal discourse in participants' contexts, intersects with their identification as bisexual. Participants drew on a discourse of (hetero)sexual marriage and children as a socially valued discourse that creates privileged subjectivities. They described how identifying as bisexual complicates this discourse as they cannot conform to the idealised construction of marriage and having children within the context of a heterosexual relationship, depicted in this discourse. Despite the powerful influence of this discourse on shaping participants' notions of relationships and family, participants also assumed positions where they resisted and rearticulated this discourse. Participants challenged the authority of this discourse as exclusively heterosexual in attempts to accommodate their own sexual identification, but did so mostly in relation to having a relationship with a woman. They did not

articulate a visibly bisexual resistance to the heteronormative construction of marriage and family discourse.

8.2.5 The unintelligibility of bisexuality

In this section I presented discourses that function together to render bisexuality as unintelligible. Participants constructed their identities in relation to a dominant heterosexual/homosexual binary, where bisexuality is not considered a valid category of identification. The unintelligibility of bisexuality was discussed in relation to an inability to construe sexual desire as being fluid or as “going both ways”. I also discussed a discourse of bisexuality as indecision. This discourse functioned to dismiss bisexuality as a more enduring category of sexual identification and positioned participants as undergoing a transitional stage towards either a heterosexual or a homosexual identity. A consequence of such a discourse of bisexuality as indecision, is an incitement for participants to “choose a side”. Within this construction bisexuality is not available as a category of sexual identification and participants are expected to eventually decide between identifying as heterosexual or homosexual. The discourses discussed in this section serve to reinforce the dominance of a heterosexual/homosexual binary and dismiss bisexuality as a viable category of identification.

8.2.6 Delegitimising discourses

This section stands in contrast with the previous grouping of discourses, where bisexuality was rendered unintelligible and dismissed as a “real” category of sexual identification. In this section bisexuality was acknowledged and constructed as highly visible in public discourses. It was however positioned in delegitimising ways through two discourses in particular. Firstly, a discourse of bisexuality as an eroticised heterosexual male fantasy posited a sexualised view of female bisexuality as it relates to male desire. It constructed bisexual women not as active and autonomous sexual agents, but instead as sexual objects in the service of male pleasure. Participants also commented on this discourse as it plays out in media discourses that depict bisexual women as hypersexual and as sexual objects.

A second delegitimising discourse is one that equates bisexuality with promiscuity. This discourse constructed bisexual women as sexually insatiable and as constantly craving sexual gratification from both men and women. In this way it positioned bisexual women as incapable of monogamy and further extended a view of bisexual women as hypersexual. The two discourses discussed here were drawn on in ways that marginalise bisexual women and contribute to participants’ reluctance to

identify as bisexual in contexts where they will be positioned as hypersexual, promiscuous and sexually decadent.

8.2.7 Silencing discourses

In this section I considered a grouping of discourses where bisexuality was rarely named – instead, the focus was on how same-sex sexuality was constructed in relation to dominant discourses. These discourses functioned as silencing discourses as they do not allow for discussion or recognition of participants' same-sex attraction or relationships. The first discourse drawn on in this section is that of same-sex sexuality as un-African. Within this discourse, same-sex sexuality was constructed as a Western import introduced to African contexts during colonisation. This discourse served to bolster a construction of a valued African identity separate from Western influence or interference. It was also shown to contribute to a patriarchal construction of female sexuality through regulating aspects of female sexuality that do not support normalised male heterosexuality.

The second discourse discussed here was a religious discourse of same-sex sexuality as sinful, unnatural and destructive. Participants spoke of the influence of such religious prohibition of same-sex sexuality on their ability to disclose their sexual identification to their families – for many participants this discourse was drawn on in their families' negative responses to their sexuality.

Both the discourses discussed here function as powerful silencing discourses in that participants find it difficult to construct counter-discourses in response to the invalidation of same-sex sexuality. However, as the findings also indicated, there were instances in which participants formulated positions that resisted these dominant discourses.

8.2.8 Normalising discourses

In this final section I discussed two discourses that are drawn on by participants as strategies to validate and normalise bisexuality. The first discourse is one of a universal bisexual potential, where bisexuality was constructed as a normal state existing in everyone. This discourse constructed sexual attraction as fluid in that individuals have an inherent potential to be attracted to both men and women. It challenged a view of bisexuality as pathological and instead regarded the suppression of bisexuality through committing to an exclusive heterosexual or homosexual orientation as harmful to individuals.

A second normalising discourse was that of bisexuality as biologically predetermined and fixed. In this discourse bisexuality was regarded as an inborn predisposition that cannot be changed. In drawing on this discourse participants were exempted from societal blame for their sexual orientation, as it was something that they did not choose. In this manner bisexuality was destigmatised as it was constructed as not being under participants' personal control.

Having provided a broad overview of the main findings of the study, I now consider in more detail the subversive potential of participants' accounts, as evidenced in their treatment of dominant discourses of sex, gender and sexuality.

8.3 Troubling the norm? Bisexuality's challenge to binary categories

In this section I provide further reflection on the findings of the study, particularly in light of one of the central research questions of the study. In Chapter 5 I described the research questions that informed the study as being centred on how participants account for their gendered and sexualised subjectivity. For ease of reference, I repeat the research questions below:

- Question 1:** How is bisexuality constructed as a discursive object in the talk of participants when accounting for their gendered and sexualised identities?
- Question 2:** How is gender constructed as a discursive object in such talk of participants?
- Question 3:** What are the implications of discourses of bisexuality for participants' ways-of-being in the world? In other words, how is subjective experience shaped by the manner in which these discourses position participants?
- Question 4:** How do participants position themselves in relation to dominant discourses of sex, gender and sexuality available in society? What are the ways in which these dominant discourses are supported, resisted or subverted in the talk of participants?
- Question 5:** Moving beyond the context of the research interview, what is the relationship between the discourses produced (and drawn on) by participants during the interviews and the institutions (such as social, political and material structures) encountered in participants' context?

While the presentation of the findings in Chapter 6 and 7 largely addressed these research questions, some additional discussion of the potential for bisexuality to subvert dominant discourses of sex, gender and sexuality is warranted. To this end, I focus on the fourth research question and consider the ways in which participants' interview accounts support, resist or subvert dominant discourses. This is particularly pertinent considering the lack of empirical research exploring the

potential for the accounts of self-identified bisexual individuals to subvert gender and sexuality binaries. I reviewed theories of bisexuality that emphasise its transgressive character in Chapter 1 and Chapter 4, where I noted that constructions in academic texts of bisexuality as an “unpigeonholed sexual identity” (Garber, 2000, p. 18) describe a radical sexuality - one which has a revolutionary potential to destabilise “Western culture’s understanding of sex, gender, and sexual orientation” (Firestein, 1996, p. xix). However, as I argued in Chapter 1 and Chapter 4, despite the prominence of such a construction of bisexuality there is a silence in academic texts where this potential is not explicitly explored in the accounts of bisexual women. In response to this silence, I first consider the subversive potential of bisexuality in relation to the heterosexual/homosexual binary, with a particular focus on bisexual erasure. This is followed by a discussion of bisexuality’s potential to challenge the male/female gender binary.

8.3.1 Bisexual erasure in support of the heterosexual/homosexual binary

In this section I consider how bisexual erasure, a concept touched on in Chapter 6, hinders the subversive potential of bisexuality described in academic texts.

A discursive erasure of bisexuality can be identified at several points throughout the findings, but particularly in participants’ accounts of a heteronormative marriage and family discourse. Several theorists have referred to the notion of bisexual erasure in dominant discourses of sexuality (e.g., Du Plessis, 1996; Yoshino, 2000). Bisexual erasure is not simply the omission of bisexuality from discourses but refers to various strategies employed by heterosexual and homosexual discourses that serve to delegitimise bisexuality (Yoshino, 2000). Du Plessis (1996, p. 22) notes that bisexual erasure is reflected in the “ideologically bound inability to imagine bisexuality concretely”, an aspect which is evident in an array of theories - from Freudian theory to contemporary queer, gay and lesbian theories. From the findings discussed in Chapter 6, it appears that such bisexual erasure is also reflected in the accounts of participants in this study.

MacDowall (2009) describes bisexual erasure as the “ways in which bisexuality as a mature form of desire is deferred, elided, or made invisible” (p. 4). This description is reflected in participants’ accounts, where bisexuality is *deferred* when participants refer to constructions of bisexuality as an identity that is not viable in the present moment. This was evident in participants’ accounts of bisexuality as an identity that attains visibility only in reflection on past relationships, where the heterosexual/homosexual binary displaces it from the present moment. Bisexuality is also *elided*, where participants take recourse to either same-sex or heterosexual relationship models - but not a

bisexual model - in engaging with marriage and family discourse. Lastly, bisexuality is made *invisible*, through a lack of language to articulate long-term unions and notions of family that make specific reference to self-aware bisexual identities. In this manner, bisexuality is “always *before, after, or outside* (rather than alongside) the imposition of cultural order” (Du Plessis, 1996, p. 29, emphasis in original).

Yoshino (2000) refers to the erasure of bisexuality from dominant discourse as functioning on a structural level, arguing that bisexual erasure is linked to the manner in which heterosexual and homosexual discourses function to preserve “overlapping political interests” (p. 353). One such shared interest is the stabilisation of exclusive sexual orientation categories (Yoshino, 2000). Through excluding bisexuality, homosexuality polices its own boundaries and remains a seemingly homogenous identity around which individuals can cohere and politically mobilise (Namaste, 1994; Yoshino, 2000). In this sense, bisexual erasure serves the interest of gay and lesbian identity politics. Heterosexuality, as a predominantly normative sexual category, similarly maintains a homogenous (and in most contexts a privileged) identity through eliding and delegitimising bisexuality. While heterosexuality, defined as being in opposition to homosexuality, depends on homosexuality for its meaning, it does not rely on bisexuality in the same manner. Bisexuality is then regarded as a threat as it blurs the boundaries between these two historically distinct categories (Yoshino, 2000).

In homosexual discourse, two particular functions of bisexual erasure can be further elaborated on. Firstly, discursive formulations of lesbian family configurations as assimilationist require strict boundary policing in order to maintain some measure of social privilege in heteronormative societies. Same-sex families are in this instance “tolerated” in heteronormative contexts only because they are contained in a lesbian relationship model that mirrors heterosexual relationship ideals. Clarke (2003) refers to the normalisation of lesbian and gay marriage as the view that “in fighting for the right to marry, lesbians and gay men are essentially fighting for the right to conform and assimilate, to be ‘just like’ heterosexuals” (p. 520). In this sense, bisexuality is a threat to lesbian family configurations since it risks destabilising the normalising logic at work here. Here, bisexuality is (imagined as) being *too visible*, in that associations of bisexual women with non-monogamy threaten more “sanitised” versions of same-sex families depicted in lesbian assimilationist discourse. Bisexual erasure functions to secure the normalising lesbian family model, and bisexual women in same-sex relationships are positioned (or visually read) as lesbian to maintain this.

A second function of bisexual erasure, as it relates to lesbian family configurations specifically, is to protect the radical potential of lesbian challenges to heteronormativity. As pointed out above, lesbian family configurations have been described as assimilationist in that they model heterosexual configurations. However, it is also possible for lesbian family configurations to trouble heteronormativity and in that way be transgressive. Making reference to a poststructuralist performativity framework of identity, Hemmings (2002) argues that:

...gender subversion lies in the closeness, the mirroring of heterosexuality, and at the same time in the underwriting of difference from heterosexuality. If just the former is in place, the result is not parody but approximation; if just the latter, an overdetermination of the boundary between normative and subversive. If both are in place, that difference from heterosexuality *must be visible* in order to be recognised by all parties in the scene. (p. 115, emphasis added)

In a same-sex family configuration, the assumed naturalness of heterosexual roles can be revealed as artificial and learned. However, the success of such a challenge to heteronormativity lies in the ultimate reading of the relationship as lesbian, and not as bisexual. Bisexual women cannot attain the same transgressive signification as homosexuality, since a relationship with a woman is visually read as lesbian, and a relationship with a man as heterosexual. Bisexuality is then regarded as minimising this transgressive potential of lesbian discourse, since bisexual women's opposite sex relationships can be visually read as heterosexual, and in that way minimise the political impact of lesbian families, who wish to assert their legitimacy as different from the norm. Here, bisexuality's engagement with marriage and family discourse is not visible *enough*, and therefore cannot be as transgressive as lesbian family configurations.

To conclude this argument, participants' engagement with marriage and family discourse indicates a structural erasure of bisexuality in that bisexuality is at times either deferred, elided, or made invisible. In this manner bisexual erasure functions to support the stability of the heterosexual/homosexual binary, in that heterosexuality remains intact as normative and homosexuality remains intact as either assimilationist or as transgressive.

I now turn to a discussion of the potential for bisexuality to subvert the dominant male/female binary.

8.3.2 Gender rebels or gender troublemakers? The slow bending of norms

Similar to its defiance of the heterosexual/homosexual binary described in the previous section, bisexuality has also been posited as confounding the oppositional organisation of the gender binary. To this end, Nagle (1995) argues for the radical potential of bisexuality to eliminate gender hierarchies and ultimately achieve a “multiply gendered society” (p. 313). In refusing to orient to one gender only, bisexuality is constructed as confusing the gender binary and creating opportunities for differently gendered selves (Däumer, 1992). In the following section I examine such a description of bisexuality as slipping across categories, and in that way undermining oppositional categories of gender. I argue that such a description of bisexuality acts as a veiling mechanism for the pervasive influence of binaries, rendering it ineffective in truly interrogating binary logic. What is instead possible, I propose, is a “slow bending” of citational practices that ultimately contribute to the transformation of gendered discourses (Van Lenning, 2004).

What is striking in participants’ accounts is that in many instances their engagement with discourses of gendered difference did not challenge the binary, but in fact often functioned to bolster it. This was particularly evident in their use of a butch/femme dichotomy, where a direct naturalisation of the gender binary was evident. Participants’ evocation of a butch/femme dichotomy was described as privileging bisexuality (through an association with a femme gender identity) and marginalising lesbian identity (through an association with a non-traditional butch gender identity). The analysis indicated how the butch dyke construction is regarded as a threat to the normalised female script and participants distanced themselves from such a construction. Further to this, participants drew on discourses of natural differences between men and women to construct the butch dyke as going “against nature” in disavowing “natural” femininity. While participants’ reification of a naturalised female identity and their othering of the butch dyke function to protect their precarious position in heteronormative discourse, such a discursive strategy also functions as a clear reification of the male/female gender binary.

Participants’ construction of relationships with men as traditionally gendered also served to reinforce the male/female binary. Participants described a sense of being “trapped” in their gendered positioning (and self-positioning) in relation to their male partner. This gendered positioning was constructed by participants as modelled on the heterosexual organisation of the gender binary, which posits a passive, helpless femininity in contradistinction to an active, competent masculinity. Similar to their treatment of gender in evoking a butch/femme dichotomy, these instances indicate a reification of the traditional male/female binary.

There were, however, instances in which participants' accounts challenged dominant discourses of gender. One such instance can be identified in their use of a discourse of romantic androgyny, where participants rejected the influence of biological sex on their attraction to others. I indicated in Chapter 6 how such a rejection of biological sex unsettled the automatic linking of sex, gender and sexuality, but also argued that it did not necessarily disrupt the male/female binary. This was evident in the manner in which participants' accounts remained orientated to *two* genders (even in disregarding the effects of these genders) and in that way still drew on a male/female binary. This was typified in one participants' statement that she cannot reduce her attraction to others to a distinction between "penises and vaginas". From this, it appears that participants' use of a discourse of romantic androgyny challenges the *effects* of the binary in rejecting biological sex as informing their romantic attraction, but does not disrupt the binary itself.

Nentwich (2008) provides a useful differentiation between "gender rebels" and "gender troublemakers" in the subversion of gender norms. Gender rebels are described as blurring the distinction between supposedly distinct gender categories in questioning their effects, but not as disrupting the very categories themselves (Nentwich, 2008). To produce more subversive accounts that truly trouble gender norms, it is necessary to trouble not only the content of the gender binary but also the ontological status of male and female (Delphy, 1993; Nentwich, 2008). While participants' rejection of biological sex can be regarded as positioning them as gender rebels, the assumed naturalness of the traditional gender binary remains taken for granted and is not significantly troubled when they draw on a discourse of romantic androgyny. Participants change the way in which they draw on the gender binary (in that they regard it as not limiting their sexual attraction) but they still reify it through evoking only two gendered categories.

A more subversive position was indicated in participants' construction of their gendered interaction in their relationships with women. Participants constructed their same-sex relationships as free from gender-specific roles and as playful and egalitarian, a construction often cited by lesbian women when reflecting on their same-sex relationships (Riggle et al., 2008). In blurring the well-developed gendered scripts implied by the heterosexual normative relationship model, participants trouble the traditional organisation of the gender binary.

From participants' engagement with discourses of gendered difference it becomes apparent that while subversive positions such as claiming a bisexual identity and rejecting the impact of biological sex might resist *aspects* of the male-female binary, the binary largely remains in place and in this

sense supports Hird's (2000) contention that "*all* modern expressions of sex and gender identity depend on the current two-sex system for their expression" (p. 359, emphasis in original). It is not possible to entirely step outside of discourse in order to challenge binary logic (Derrida, 1976). Hemmings (1999), in reflecting on descriptions of bisexuality as different from oppositional categories, states that "those 'dreadful binaries' are scarcely somewhere 'out there', they inform and produce my identity as much as anyone else's" (p. 197).

Further to this, I want to argue that descriptions of bisexuality that posit it as defying the gender binary act as "veiling terms", to borrow Van Lenning's (2004) phrasing, and risk depicting a false sense of emancipation. Referring to the subversive potential of cross-dressing and sexual ambiguity, Van Lenning (2004) states that radical descriptions of such practices "imply a sex-transcending character, which, on closer inspection, fundamentally retraces the conceptual opposition between man and woman" (p. 42). Hemmings (2002) echoes this when she states that "abstract claims of transferable transcendence or merging obscure more than they reveal. They are unhelpful precisely because they reproduce as distinct the opposites that they then proclaim are reunited, and rely on that middle ground as unifying and static" (p. 118-119). Participants' accounts illustrate the persuasive power of the gender binary – while they resist dominant discourses of biological sex as informing sexual attraction and challenge gendered discourses in certain instances, their accounts indicate that they cannot entirely transcend the gender binary since gender saturates their positioning in discourse. Theorising bisexuality as outside of oppositional categories closes off opportunities to interrogate this pervasive influence of the gender and sexuality binaries.

Finally, while it appears that bisexuality's "radical potential" to subvert dominant binaries is not entirely realised in participants' accounts, it does not necessarily follow that the political value of bisexuality in challenging such binaries is invalidated. Participants' accounts indicate that while complete subversion of gender binaries is not possible in their discursive contexts, what does occur is a "slow bending" of norms (Van Lenning, 2004). According to Butlerian theory such (perhaps less dramatic) changes in norms indicate that resistance is not necessarily enacted through "entirely novel ways of understanding gender, but rather arise[s] as variations or improvisations of existing gender scripts" (Morison, 2011, p. 270). Over-enthusiastic claims of the subversive potential of bisexuality can obscure these smaller ruptures in gendered norms.

Morison (2011, p. 113) notes that "people may have an interest in adhering more or less closely to the various gendered scripts according to what is interactively useful at the time", where citing

“correct” gendered positions might form part of a cultural survival strategy to maintain one’s identity as socially viable. This was illustrated in the findings where possibilities for creating gender trouble through “incorrect” repetition of gendered norms associated with a female identity, as it relates to a butch/femme dichotomy, threatened participants’ precarious position in heteronormative discourse. In other instances, greater deviation from gender norms might be possible where participants might be able to assume more resistant positions. This was evident where participants were able to construct their relationships with women as sites of resistance and in that way stretch the boundaries of gendered identity and interaction. In a sense, maintaining their viability in discourse plays out as a balancing act, where participants negotiate different measures of risk involved in “correct” and “incorrect” citation of gender norms. While certainly not due to an essential or universally authoritative nature, participants’ accounts demonstrate the “enormous force and impact” of gender and sexuality binaries and in this sense their discursive stretching of the boundaries of these categories might be more effective than efforts to subvert them entirely (Van Lenning, 2004, p. 43).

8.4 Limits of the study and suggestions for future research

Some limits of the present study can be identified. The first of these relates to the manner in which the research focus of the current study was defined. In reflecting on the findings I wonder if the sexualisation of bisexuality in dominant discourse influenced my own approach to the study, shaping the manner in which I defined its boundaries of investigation. From the inception of this study the focus of my research was on how bisexual women negotiate their identity as bisexual, and not on how they construct sexual practice or sexual desire. Although many of the interviews included talking about sex, I did not formulate a specific research focus or any interview questions specifically related to sexual practice. My motivation for this was partly because of the current nature of the research landscape as it relates to bisexuality in Africa and South Africa. As discussed in Chapter 1, local research focuses almost exclusively on male bisexuality with a specific interest in how male bisexual practice contributes to HIV risk. This is of course a valuable area of investigation, but my intention with the present study was to contribute to the lack of research exploring bisexual identity construction, instead of sexual practice, and especially to address the lack of female representation in such research.

However, upon further reflection, I do believe that my motivation for focusing on identity was also informed by my desire to avoid contributing to the further sexualisation of bisexual women that is common in dominant discourse, through a direct focus on aspects of their sexual practice. In

maintaining a focus on identity, I was hoping to avoid contributing to a construction of bisexual women as hypersexual and eroticised. There is certainly also value in conducting research that includes a focus on bisexual women's sexual practice and future studies can productively explore this.

Similarly, my framing of the study as focused on bisexuality as a category of identification that differs from the norm, might have shaped the findings. Throughout the presentation of the analysis, I highlighted instances during the interviews where participants focused on their relationships with women and other aspects related to same-sex sexuality, instead of also commenting on their relationships with men or drawing on references to bisexuality. This tendency was likely informed by participants' orientation towards the interviews – considering that my research focus was on participants' difference (in that their identification as bisexual challenges dominant discourse) it is possible they viewed their relationships with men as “normal” and therefore not worth commenting on, while their relationships with women were regarded as requiring clarification and explanation due to the positioning of such relationships as “abnormal”. Perhaps ironically then, the study's focus on bisexuality translated to some extent into a silencing of discussions of participants' attraction to and relationships with *both men and women*, resulting, at times, in a more general focus on same-sex sexuality instead of bisexuality.

It is also valuable to comment on the narrow focus assumed in this study, which had the aim of exploring some of the oversights in South African and international research related to bisexuality. The study's clearly defined focus allowed for a rich and in-depth study of how a particular group – South African women actively claiming an identity as bisexual – account for their gendered and sexualised identities. However, this narrow focus had the implication that the full diversity of bisexual experience could not be attended to. The sample of the current study is largely homogenous in terms of age, social class and geographical context and is by no means representative of the rich and diverse experiences of South African bisexual women.

The study's particular focus, in only including participants who self-identify as bisexual, also had the consequence that the experiences of individuals who do *not* choose to label themselves in that manner were excluded from this study. It might be that some individuals privately consider themselves as attracted to both men and women but reject the label bisexual, possibly due to the stigma attached to it in certain contexts, or perhaps due to a resistance to defining their identity in

terms of their sexual orientation. Future research could explore such individuals' experiences by also including participants who do not self-identify as bisexual but who regard their sexuality as fluid.

An additional methodological limit of the study is its reliance on individual interviews in collecting data at the expense of methods that capitalise on how meanings are constructed in relation to others, such as during focus group discussions. I found that conducting joint interviews in addition to individual interviews was valuable as it extended the relational context in which data were constructed. However, focus group discussions optimise the social character of constructing meaning and provide knowledge that is created in active discussion, allowing for statements to be "challenged, extended, developed, undermined or qualified in ways that generate rich data for the researcher" (Willig, 2008, p. 31). This complements the theoretical approach underscoring the study, as poststructuralist theory, as well as discourse analysis, is concerned with how meaning is constructed among people through language. Wilkinson (1998) argues that focus group discussions are appropriate when conducting research using a feminist approach as it locates the individual in a social setting.

Although focus groups have considerable advantages, they do not necessarily provide privileged access to participants' realities (Wilkinson, 1998). Some participants might be concerned about confidentiality in a group context, which could impact on how comfortable they feel during the discussions and could limit the extent of their participation. It might also be that certain marginal discourses are silenced during the focus group discussions. Shefer (1999) provides an example from her research on constructions of heterosexuality, where a participant initiated the focus group discussion by drawing on a religious discourse when proclaiming her opposition to premarital sex. In the remaining discussion the religious discourse served to silence other participants by prohibiting any discussion of knowledge of or experience with premarital sex. It might then be that discourses that are silenced in a group context can be drawn on more freely in the context of an individual interview. Despite these limitations of focus groups, research exploring this topic can benefit from the inclusion of data collection methods such as focus groups and joint interviews, in order to support a feminist aim of exploring women's realities in context (Wilkinson, 1998).

Based on the limits of the current study discussed in this section, the following suggestions for future research are proposed:

- Future research can benefit from exploring more diverse aspects of bisexual women's experience by including the voices of participants from a broader range of subject positions. Specifically, future research will benefit from including participants from varied socio-economic positions, age groupings as well as bisexual women living in rural areas.
- Studies that explore the realities of individuals who do not self-identify as bisexual but who regard their sexuality as fluid can contribute to diverse representations of sexuality in South African research.
- Research that makes use of focus group discussions can add valuable insights into the relational contexts in which meaning around bisexuality is constructed.

Some additional suggestions include the following:

- Considering the lack of research exploring bisexual men's subjectivities (as opposed to research focusing more narrowly on bisexual men's sexual practice and HIV risk), it will be valuable to conduct research with an explicit focus on how bisexual men negotiate their identities.
- Almost conversely, there is a lack of research with a focus on bisexual women's sexual practice and sexual desire. Research conducted in this area should be mindful of not contributing to the sexualisation of bisexual women in dominant discourse.
- There is a need for research exploring how bisexuality is constructed in LGBTI organisations in South Africa. This could include investigating bisexual visibility in such organisations as well as exploring the differences and similarities in the challenges faced by bisexual and lesbian women.

8.5 Conclusion

Through this study I hope to contribute to the visibility of bisexual women in South African discourses around sexuality and to stimulate further research that will have positive effects in the lives of the participants and other bisexually-identified women. As part of a feminist project I hope that this study (and future research in this area) will open up different possibilities for sexual identification and contribute to a discursive context in which variations in sexual identification are not only tolerated but welcomed. Bisexuality is one of many potential forms of resistance to the coercive force of heteronormativity and demonstrates the potential for discourses around sex, gender and sexuality to create new positions outside of what we imagine to be possible.

The findings of this study however also demonstrated that despite this potential for bisexuality to challenge dominant discourses, the binary logic of gender and sexuality remains extraordinarily influential and constrains the available positions that bisexual women are able to assume. Further to this, in many instances participants' accounts indicated their inadvertent participation in maintaining such a binary logic. A continuing feminist project of challenging dominant discourses will then entail careful navigation of naming bisexuality in order to create bisexual visibility, and resisting an essentialist treatment of bisexuality as a reified category of identity. During the interviews a participant, Phindile, commented on this dilemma by stating that there is value in claiming a bisexual identity, in that in order to do away with sexual and gendered hierarchies it may be necessary to at first risk a measure of essentialist treatment in order to create visibility around bisexuality. She elaborated on this with the following metaphor:

Phindile: To get rid of dust in a mat, you need to shake it out; you need to bring it to the surface, in order for it to no longer be there. I think if you sweep it under the rug it's always going to be there.

I found that Phindile's argument resonates with a poststructuralist view of strategically deploying categories of identity. Similar to other aspects of identity politics, naming bisexuality is part of a process where bisexuality is made visible to increase awareness of sexual variation, through "bringing the dust to the surface". At the same time such strategic essentialism entails working towards an ideal of reaching a point where sexual identification is no longer assigned such importance.

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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Meanings of bisexuality/bisexual identity

- How would you describe your sexuality?
- Which label/term, if any, do you use and why?
- Do you use the same term under all circumstances or does it sometimes differ?
- What does the term “bisexual” mean to you?
- Have you always considered your sexuality as (bisexual/other term)?
- Can you tell me the story of how you came to this point, where you identify as (bisexual/other term)?
- Is being (bisexual/other term) something that is important to you in terms of how you see yourself?

Relationships and gender

- Are you involved with anybody at the moment? Please tell me more about it.
- Can you tell me more about your past relationships?
- What do you look for in a partner or in a relationship?
- Are you open to others about being (bisexual/other term)?
- How do people (family/friends/colleagues) respond when you tell them about your sexual orientation?
- How would you say do gay men/lesbian women/straight men and women respond to bisexuality?
- How would you say do people think about bisexuality, in general?
- How would you say do the experiences of bisexual men and women differ (and how are they similar)?
- What are your views on gender/ideas around femininity and masculinity?



APPENDIX B: BIOGRAPHICAL QUESTIONNAIRE

Kindly complete the following details. You do not need to provide your name and any information you share will be treated confidentially.

Age: _____

Home language: _____

In which suburb or area do you live? _____

Do you live with:

Family	___
Partner	___
Friend(s)	___
On your own	___
Other	___

Do you have a regular partner? _____

If yes, for how long has he or she been your partner? _____

What is the highest grade you completed at school? _____

Have you studied or are you currently studying at a tertiary institution? _____

Are you currently employed? _____

If yes, what is your current occupation? _____

If no, what kind of work did you do previously? _____

APPENDIX C: MATERIALS USED TO ADVERTISE THE STUDY AND INVITE PARTICIPATION

Message posted on Internet forums of local LGBTI websites (linked to my Facebook profile)

Research study: The experiences of South African bisexual women

I'm currently conducting a study about the experiences of bisexual women in Gauteng and am looking for **female participants who describe themselves as bisexual** and are interested in being interviewed. The interview will take approximately 1½ hours and can take place at a location of your choice. Your participation will of course be completely **anonymous**. There is a lack research in this area and your input will add immense value to expanding current understandings of bisexuality.

If you are interested in participating, or would simply like some more information, you can contact me through this post, send me a Facebook message with your contact details or phone/sms/email me at:

Email: ingrid.lynch@up.ac.za

Phone/sms: 082 938 9158

Please circulate this message to people you think might be interested!

Thanks and regards,

Ingrid Lynch

Department of Psychology

University of Pretoria

Poster invitation distributed at local LGBTI organisations

Research study: The experiences of South African bisexual women

I'm currently conducting a study about the experiences of bisexual women in Gauteng and am looking for **female participants who describe themselves as bisexual** and are interested in being interviewed. The interview will take approximately 1½ hours and can take place at a location of your choice. Your participation will of course be completely **anonymous**. There is a lack research in this area and your input will add immense value to expanding current understandings of bisexuality.

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Phone/sms: 082 938 9158

Ingrid Lynch

Department of Psychology

University of Pretoria

APPENDIX D: INFORMED CONSENT FORM



RESEARCH STUDY: THE EXPERIENCES OF SOUTH AFRICAN BISEXUAL WOMEN

The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to explore South African bisexual women's experiences of their sexuality. Bisexuality is not widely acknowledged or accepted and this study aims to give recognition to the experiences of bisexual women in South Africa. The study is being conducted as part of the principal investigator's PhD degree.

Your Participation

Should you choose to participate in the study, you will take part in an individual interview that will last approximately 1½ hours. This interview will be recorded in order to ensure an accurate portrayal of your comments. This recording will be treated confidentially and only the researcher will have access to it. Your participation will be anonymous in that your name or identifying details will not be shared with anyone. Should you be interested, you will be given an opportunity to review the results of the study and provide input into the conclusions drawn.

The information obtained from you during the interview will be used for research purposes only. All data used in the research study will be stored for 15 years at a safe place at the University of Pretoria, for archiving purposes.

Potential risks or discomfort

It is not anticipated that participating in the study will cause any discomfort. It might however happen that sensitive or emotional matters are raised during the interview. Should you feel there is anything you would like to talk about further, you can contact a trained professional at PRISM Lifestyle Centre for confidential counselling, at the following numbers: (012) 344 6500 (helpline) or (012) 344 5108.

Furthermore, should you at any point during the interview feel uncomfortable with a question, you will not be required to answer that question. Your participation in this study is voluntary, which means that you can withdraw at any time without offering any explanation.

Benefits of participation

There will be no direct benefit from the study, however by participating in the study you will contribute to greater awareness of bisexuality and the various experiences of bisexual women.

Should you have any further questions regarding the research study, you can contact the researcher, Ingrid Lynch or the study supervisor, Prof. David Maree:

Ingrid Lynch (Principal investigator)

(012) 420 5451

Prof. David Maree (Supervisor)

(012) 420 2916

Further contact details (Ingrid Lynch):

Department of Psychology
Humanities Building, 11-04
University of Pretoria
Lynwood Road
Hatfield
ingrid.lynch@up.ac.za

RESEARCH STUDY: THE EXPERIENCES OF SOUTH AFRICAN BISEXUAL WOMEN

Consent to Participate

I hereby confirm that I have been informed about the nature, procedures, and risks of this study. I also give permission for the recording of the interview. I am aware that the information will only be used for research purposes, and that confidentiality will be protected. My participation in the study is voluntary and I can withdraw at any time without offering any explanation or suffering any consequences.

Participant signature _____

Date _____

Ingrid Lynch (Researcher) _____

Date _____

Prof. D.J.F. Maree (Supervisor) _____

Date _____